



黒猫 if
上

15

俺の妹

Isukasa Fushimi
Illustration
伏見つがも

電撃文庫

■ore no imouto ga
konnani kawaii
wake ga nai¹⁵
kuroneko if



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「ねえ、先輩。海が紅く染まって——とっても綺麗ね」



ore no imouto ga
kawaii kawaii
wa

(“Hey, Senpai. The sea is dyed red--- it's so beautiful”)

more no imouto ga konnani kawaii wake ga nai © kuroneko if Story & Characters

俺の妹がこんなに可愛いわけがない © 黒猫 if
あらすじ & 登場キャラクター

The story of "me and my sister" so far

Kyosuke Kosaka, an ordinary high school student, has a younger sister named Kirino whom he doesn't get along with.

One day, Kyosuke discovers his sister's "terrible secret".

Kirino, who used to be his perfect sister, turns out to be an otaku who loves little sisters and ero games.

Kyosuke is asked for "life counselling" by his cocky and not-so-cute sister, and gets caught up in all sorts of commotion.

高坂桐乃
kosaka kirino

She is a junior high school student who has just about everything on her plate, including a good figure, excellent grades, and excellent athletic ability, and is even a model. On the other hand, she is also an otaku who loves anime and games.



黒猫
kuroneko

Kirino's otaku friend she met at an offline-party. She makes painful chuuni remarks, but she also has a family oriented side and is good at games.



赤城瀬菜
akagi sena

A classmate of Kuroneko's and a fellow member of the Game Research Club. She looks like a class president but is actually a fujoshi.



赤城浩平
akagi kouhei

Kyosuke's classmate, Sena's big brother, a member of the soccer team, and a severe sis-con. He once went to buy a boys love game in the middle of the night for his sister.



三浦絃之介
miura gennosuke

He is the head of the Games Research Club, and loves two-dimensional girls, bringing figures and games into the club room.



高坂京介
kosaka kyosuke

Unlike his sister Kirino, he is an ordinary high school student. He has a caring personality and helps Kirino with "life counseling" after they had been in a cold war for a long time.



沙織・バジーナ
saori-vageena

She is a tall girl dressed in typical otaku fashion. She is the administrator of the social network community "Otaku girls Unite". When Kyosuke and Kirino attend an offline party held by Saori, they become friends.



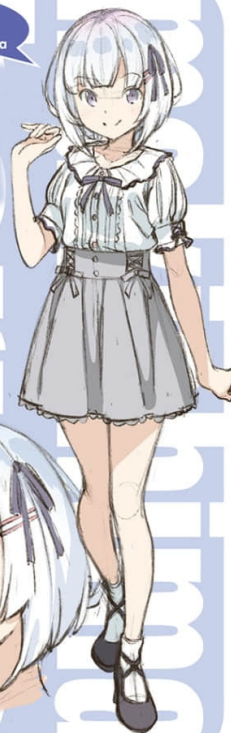
真壁楓
makabe kaede

A male member of the Game-Research Club. He is the tsukkomi of the games club, and also writes scenarios for games.



槇島悠
makishima haruka

She is a mysterious girl I met at camp. Her special skills are sketching and fortune-telling.



This story contains elements of the paranormal and other phenomena.

Chapter 1

My name is Kyosuke Kosaka, and I'm just an ordinary high school student.

I don't know how many times I've repeated this self-introduction.

I'm sorry. I'm sure you're sick of it. But, please bear with me and listen to me.

You may have forgotten about me, who has a weak shadow.

There are some things that you have to be clear about so that you don't get confused.

For example, you need to know when the present is.

Well, first things first.

Since you've listened to this long narrative, I suggest you reset your mind at this point.

I don't mean to sound like my sister, but wouldn't it be weird if you had memories of the previous route?

Did you reset?

So, let's start with the most important part and go over it again.

I have a younger sister, Kirino, who is three years younger than me.

She's also an incredibly cocky little thing - she's cuter than anyone in terms of looks, but.

We didn't get along very well.

We were living under the same roof, but we didn't talk to each other, didn't make eye contact.

It was that bad.

But one day, I found out my sister's secret.

She's an otaku who loves little sisters and erotic games, and that's a hell of a thing.

And then my sister, who I hate so much, said,

--- I need life counselling

And that was the beginning of a big ruckus.

It was the beginning of a long story.

However, the story of "me and my sister" has come to an end.
Yes. Kirino went abroad to study sports and left Japan.

She's gone from my life.

That's not the end of the story, of course, but...

My sassy, annoying, cute little sister won't be in the story for a while.

Okay, so here's the thing.

It's important, so please listen carefully.

It's June, my senior year in high school.

For my sister, it was June of her third year of junior high school.

A year after I found out about Kirino's hobby.

Two months after Ruri Gokou became my kouhai.

And let me make a declaration.

What I'm about to tell you is not a story about "me and my sister"...

It's a story about me and Kuroneko.

Kuroneko is her handle, her real name is Ruri Gokou.

She has beautiful black hair cut in the front, skin as clear as snow, wears black gothic lolita as her personal clothing, and repeatedly makes painful comments that are ridiculed as "chuunibyou" - she is an otaku, cute, and a friend of my sister. That was the girl I knew as Kuroneko.

My first encounter with her was about a year ago in Akihabara.

It was when my little sister Kirino went to an off-line meeting of the otaku circle "Otaku Girls Unite" to make friends.

There was a group of otaku girls, all talking about the same hobby, but-

There were some who didn't fit in with the fun banter.

And that's Kirino and Kuroneko.

They are the problem children of the otaku circle.

Or maybe they were fellow outcasts.

At first it was like that.

So... Saori Bajina, the organizer of the circle, was very considerate and invited them to the after party.

That's how they became friends.

--- Isn't that the show behind Meruru? That jakigan chuunibyou anime.

--- You say things you will regret.

--- It's a waste of time that only man-children¹ who are satisfied with moe will watch.

Even though at first they got in a fight.

--- Oh you poor thing! I can't believe you haven't seen it! Don't underestimate kid's anime!

--- What do you mean chuunibyou anime.

--- I, for one, hate that word to death.

They talked about their favourite hobbies without hiding it from anyone.

1. Ōkina otomodachi is a Japanese phrase that literally means "a big friend" or "an adult friend". Japanese otaku use it to describe themselves as adult fans of an anime, a manga, or a TV show that is originally aimed at children.

Expressing their full opinions to each other and even cussing each other out.

Although, they seemed to be having a lot of fun, when I tried to stop them from fighting and said, “It's only anime, isn't it?”

I don't know if they really enjoyed each other's company or not.

For me, it was my first otaku friend.

Since then, the relationship between Kirino and Kuroneko has deepened steadily.

At the same time, without realizing it, the relationship between me and Kuroneko changed little by little, I guess.

For me, Kuroneko who was always “my sister's friend” -

Now, she's my kouhai, as Ruri Gokou, we go to the same school.

When she first entered high school, Kuroneko showed her shyness and seemed to be isolated in class, but after joining the after school "Games Research Club", she made a friend named Sena Akagi and is gradually becoming familiar with the class.

That's what's going on with me and Kuroneko.

Once again, do you remember?

Let's begin.

The cherry blossoms in the schoolyard have all fallen, and the season is turning to summer.

Let's restart the “if” story after school in June.

That day, I finished my classes and headed to the club room of the games club.

As I walked down the hallway of the club building, I met Kuroneko just before the stairs leading to the second floor.

She bowed to me with a calm, seemingly unsociable gesture.

“Ah, senpai, hello”

“Hey”

She responded by raising one hand.

Recently, I'd come to understand that means...

She seems to be in a good mood today.

I was a little surprised.

This is because Kuroneko had a reason to be depressed.

Kuroneko, a member of the Games Research Club, was working with Sena to submit her work to a game contest called "Chaos Create".

Now, the results have just come out.

Unfortunately, it didn't win any prizes, and in fact, the game was heavily criticized on the internet forums as a "shit game".

It was a tragic outcome.

Kuroneko was resolute, but Sena was furious and went on a rampage.

Well, the game they made was a fusion of Sena's dungeon RPG and Kuroneko's novel game.

The name of the game was "Labyrinth of Greed".

A mixture of the "chuunibyou" element that Kuroneko threw in with the "homosexual" element that Sena threw in actually made it quite gruesome.

To say the least, it was a game with very niche appeal, so I can't blame them for calling it a shitty game. I can't blame the people on the Internet.

Even so, for Kuroneko, it was a work that she had created with all her heart and soul together with her "first friend from high school".

How can you not feel depressed if someone criticizes that?

"You look like you want to say something, senpai?"

I suddenly realized that Kuroneko was looking into my face and giggling.

"Ah, I uh... that's, um"

"Did you think I might be depressed?"

I was struck by being caught out. Then Kuroneko stained her cheeks in embarrassment.

"Honestly, you're such a softy... I'm used to being criticised... it's not like that."

"...But"

How can you not be disappointed?

I know exactly how much thought you put into making that game.

I'd been watching Kuroneko work on it in my room for a long time.....

When there was a bug in the game that she couldn't fix herself, she bowed to Sena, who was still on bad terms with her, and asked for her help. She asked Sena to help her, to make the game with her.

“The Labyrinth of Greed” was a work of such devotion for Kuroneko.

Even though it ended up being like that, she didn't lose heart.

“I don't have time to be depressed. I'm going to make the next game. This time, I'll be with Sena from the very beginning.”

“... I see”

That's really amazing.

I think so from the bottom of my heart.

Kirino, Saori, Kuroneko, and Sena.

The fact that there are so many otaku out there who are able to devote themselves to something like this, is dazzling to the average person like me.

“.....”

We walked in silence for a while.

“Um, hey”

Kuroneko suddenly said.

“I have something to report”

Kuroneko, to me?

When I turned my attention to her, she said

“Things, have improved.Class, and, things. That's why... For now, a report”

In little drips, she spilled her feelings.

A while ago, she had trouble fitting into the class and was forced to do cleaning duty.

It has improved, she said.

It was hard to tell, but Kuroneko seemed to be thanking me.

So I responded with this:

“I didn't do much.”

“You're right, you didn't do much”

She agreed!? She couldn't say "That's not the case" and deny it!?

"But, I was happy"

"....."

"I was happy to hear that you were worried about me, and not your sister."

Kuroneko looked down as she spoke.

At that time, I just told her how I really felt.

I see. You were happy?

I'm glad to hear that. A warm feeling fills my heart.

"Um... senpai... I---..."

When Kuroneko, who had her head down, tried to say something,

"Ah, Gokou-san!"

I heard a familiar voice from behind.

"!"

Startled, her shoulders jumped, and she turned to face the voice.

There stood a red-haired girl with red glasses.

It's Sena Akagi. She is a classmate of Kuroneko's, a member of the same club, and a friend.

She's also the sister of my friend, Kohei Akagi.

Sena, seeming to have just notice me walking next to Kuroneko, ran up to me and said,

"Aha, Kousaka senpai is here too. You two, let's go to club together! ...Gokou-san? What is it, are you pouting?"

"I'm not"

"You are. Right Kousaka senpai?"

She was. Her cheeks were puffed up and she was pouting.

What is it? Does it have something to do with what you were about to say?

I was about to ask her about it again right away.

Kuroneko suddenly became grumpy and walked off, leaving me and Sena behind.

Apparently, I had missed the opportunity.

“What was that about?”

“.....Who knows”

Sena and I looked at each other with heads tilted in confusion.

The games club room is located in the club building, near the end of the second floor hallway.

It's a magical place full of computers, games, and other otaku goods, but with the addition of two female members who like to keep things clean, things have become a little more decent.

If a teacher comes in unannounced, one might be able to cover it up.

But if they take a closer look, they'll find some pornographic figures.

In the club room, the members of the club are gathering.

“All right, we're almost ready!”

The one who dragged the whiteboard to a prominent position and raised his voice was Gennosuke Miura.

He was the head of the gaming club and my first male otaku friend.

He is a tall, thin, cowardly, glasses-wearing, old-faced boy.

“Attention!”

The president clapped his hands. It was rare to see him so animated.

Basically, this is a very laid-back club.

Doujin game production is the main activity, but there are many ghost members, and not all of the active members are making games. There are more of them just playing.

But today's mood was different from usual.

What could this mean?

He addressed the club members, who were now looking at him suspiciously.

“Hey, guys! Listen up! Today, we will be discussing our future plans!”

“What's going on, boss? You're suddenly acting like this is a normal school club.”

“This is a normal club!”

The president shouted.

The one who gave him the cold shoulder was Kaede Makabe.

He is a serious-looking boy with a baby face. In fact, I would say he is the most sensible person in the games club.

He spoke on behalf of everyone.

“We've been allowed to act freely up until now, but suddenly you're starting to take charge, and that's strange. Please explain it to me properly.”

“.....Hmm, well that's true”

Even the outrageous president is curbed by Makabe-kun's voice. Maybe they are a good pair.

“Ah-..... ahem”

The president, who had been stumbling over his words, cleared his throat and then turned his attention to the first-year club members.

“Akagi, Gokou”

“Yes”

Only Sena replied.

“You guys wrote a plan, competed, made a game, submitted it to a contest... and got results.”

“The results were disappointing, though.”

Sena said with an uncomfortable look.

“You got something out of it, didn't you?”

“..... well, maybe a little.”

“That's because you guys put your all into it. The first-year members who just joined the club made a game all the way through, no matter what the public thought of it. That's pretty impressive, really.”

The president wasn't just saying that for consolation. That much I could tell.

I'm sure that Sena and Kuroneko got the message as well.

“.....Thank you. But, I'm not happy with the results.”

“Me too. Next time, I'll make a game that will entertain those who disparaged it as shit game, and make them say 'This is fun!' Kukuku ... That will be my revenge.”

Motivation like a black flame erupted from the bodies of Sena and Kuroneko.

“That's the spirit!”

The president nodded in satisfaction.

“Hey, Makabe. How can you play games and slack off when you see how motivated these guys are? I'm in my third year. I'm graduating soon, and then I'll be gone.”

“I heard that line last year, too. Will you be able to graduate?”

“Don't make fun of me! I'm trying to make a point here! Up until now, we have left it to the initiative of club members to create their own work.”

“That's right. Those who were serious could take it seriously, and those who wanted to slack off could do so.”

“I think it was not a bad policy. A group project in a club can't work unless all the participants are motivated... but!”

The president slammed his palm on the table.

“At the end of my high school days, I want to make a game with you guys! Let's do a group project! All of you who were motivated by the activities of the first year members are invited to participate!”

Ooh, somebody raised his voice.

As the flames grew, Kuroneko's motivation infected the club members.

The fire was spreading, I could almost see it.

“Sounds good, please let me participate”

“Makabe senpai.....”

Sena was delighted by his enthusiasm.

She was probably thrilled that her influence was having a positive effect on the club's frivolous attitude.

“Akagi-san, let's make a game together”

“Yes!”

Sena nodded, her eyes sparkling.

“You know..... there's something I'd like to do if I'm going to make it with Makabe senpai!”

“It's something to do with homosexuality, isn't it?”

“Yesss!”

“You can't do that, okay?”

Makabe-kun smiled and laughed.

“Booo”

Sena puffed out her cheeks in frustration.

Sena Akagi - she's what's known as a "fujoshi," a person who prefers romantic works between men.

Just the other day, we were voting on who's game design to follow.

She did a terrifying job of unveiling her sexual fantasies, including characters modelled on the male club members.

Among them was a character modelled after me, with “meat toilet” tattooed on his ass. She's one hell of a sexual harassment kouhai.

I'll tell you what, I'm still mad about that.

What's with the "boo", you rotten bitch? I'll never forgive you.²

I don't know how Makabe-kun is able to smile at Sena.

He is still trying to tame the rotten beast.

“Akagi-san, you 'got something' out of submitting to the contest, didn't you?”

“Yeah, well...”

Sena pouted her lips.

“Then you understand what I'm trying to say”

“I understand. This time, I have to create something that users will find interesting, not something that I find interesting.”

“The ideal game is one that is fun for me to make and fun for the user to play”

“That's so difficult...”

“Ahh, I've never been able to do it either”

“Eh”

“Now let's try to make the ideal game together”

“.....I'll try”

Makabe-kun's persuasion was successful, and with the new work, it looks like he will be able to

² Fujoshi literally translates to “rotten girl”

control Sena's antics.

The president interrupts such a fine performance with a loud voice.

"Hey, look you guys! Makabe is acting like a senpai just because he's in front of the female members~!"

"Hey! You're ruining it!"

This was the daily life of the gaming club to which Kuroneko and I belonged.

It's a noisy scene from our new life that started in spring.

And so ---

In the Games Research Club, we decided to make a new game together.

As I have no skills, I can only provide support.

I'm going to do what I can.

When Kuroneko was isolated at school, I meddled in her affairs, saying I wanted to do something to help her.

I worked out a plan with Saori, accompanied her when she joined the games club, and was by her side when she was making games... and now we're still in the same club. Even though I'm sitting exams.

It was never out of a sense of duty. At first, it might have been because my old vices took over and I couldn't resist.

I myself was enjoying spending time with the Kuroneko.

Don't get me wrong. I'm here because I want to be.

"What kind of game are we making?"

I raise one hand and ask.

"Well, if we're going to make a game with this group, it's probably going to be a novel game."

The president, who had his arms folded, answered immediately. Sena raised her hand to speak.

"Yeah, why? There are other genres of game I want to make!"

"The reason why we should make a novel game is..."

The president placed a stack of papers on the table.

It was the proposal for the competition that Kuroneko and Sena submitted the other day.

“The first year group created Labyrinth of Greed. It was submitted, and you saw the results.”

“.....” “..... Yes”

Kuroneko and Sena affirmed.

“So. Now you guys want to make something based on that reflection. Isn't that right?”

“...That's right” “I guess so”

“I'm sure each of you has thought about what went wrong and how to make it better. We'll get to that later, but let me tell you what we discussed amongst the seniors”

Ooh, the president is acting like a senpai.

“Don't make a complicated game yet, you guys. Make a simple game and get good results. We'll start with a novel game, which is relatively easy to make. In this genre, the scenario - the story - is important. If we can get good results with a novel game, it could help improve the scenario for all the games this club makes in the future”

In "Labyrinth of Greed," the scenario written by Kuroneko was heavily criticized.

Also, the homosexual elements that Sena threw in were fiercely rejected and even mocked.

I guess that means we should fix the bad points one by one.

“I want to use my last year to help you guys improve. I'd like to make this a 'handover period' for the games club. I'll be happy if you guys make a lot of good games after I'm gone”

Perhaps embarrassed by his own line, the president scratched his nose and cleared his throat.

Kuroneko and Sena pondered for a while.....

“..... I- have no objection”

Said Kuroneko. Sena sniffed,

“I agree, Gokou-san. let's make a novel game”

“I want to address the team's shortcomings quickly. Sena Akagi, everything will be fine as long as you can restrain your sexual proclivities”

“If I can do that, there won't have any trouble..... Also, just call me Sena. You're too hard on your friends.”

“.....Right, understood. Se- Se- ”

Sena, she muttered with a fading voice.

Kuroneko is..... not accustomed to the situation of making friends.

Sena giggled and said in a light tone.

“Well then, yoroshiku-onegaishimasu³, Ruri-chan.”

“Ruri-chan?... I-isn't it too sudden?”

“I can stop if you don't like it?”

“I don't mind”

The answer was immediate. It was hard to keep from laughing.

Kuroneko scowled at me and returned to the conversation as if to hide it.

“This is ... I just ... I don't want to admit ... I don't think my scenario will improve anytime soon”

Just the fact that she can say this is a sign of her growth.

The president handed out some disks to me and the first-years.

“What's this boss?”

When Sena asked, the president answered,

“Among all the games we made, this one had the highest user rating. Complete it before we start on the next one”

“.....Eeh, it's not an ecchi one is it?”

“I know what you're thinking. It's a gal game for all ages. The scenario was written by Makabe.”

“Makabe senpai, you were able to write the scenario?”

“Yes, well. It's just that I'm a slow writer, so I haven't made any new works. It's too hard for me to write gal game scenarios on my own. I envy Gokou-san's writing speed.”

“I wanted to make a shooting game, so I had to compromise on that one. I thought the scenario Makabe wrote was interesting, and it was well-received by the club members and users alike. For the next game, I'm thinking of having him and Gokou write a scenario cooperatively.”

Mmm-hmm.

“Of course, it's Makabe's initiative. Based on the proposal he submits, we'll have a meeting to finalize the content. After that, we'll divide the scenario between Makabe and Gokou. Considering their writing speeds, I think it would be best to assign Makabe to write the main heroine scenario and Gokou to write the others. Once the scenario is written, the team can read it together and decide how to revise it”

3 Yoroshiku literally means “please treat me well” but is used more like “I look forward to working with you” or “pleased to meet you” – Onegaishimasu is a polite “please” used to make it more formal.

“We will make a story after listening to everyone's wishes about what kind of game to make, so please think about it before next time.”

Said Makabe-kun. I was impressed by the plan, and spoke in admiration,

“Wow, you guys really know how to work together”

I watched Kuroneko and Sena create "Labyrinth of Greed" from start to finish.

At that time, the finished product was submitted as is.

This time, we have to listen to everyone's opinions from the beginning, and once we've made it, we have to listen to everyone's opinions and fix things, right?

It's a lot harder than before, isn't it?

“... Yeah ... Group production ... That's how it's supposed to be”

“That's right. You can't be as free as when you're alone. You have to suppress your tastes, hold back, and adjust to the needs of others. In return, you can make things that you can't make alone. Gokou, can you do that?”

In response to the president's question, Kuroneko said

“I'll try”

With a glint of determination in her eye.

It would be foolish for me to worry about anything else. There's only one thing I can do.

“I'll support you”

That's all I can do.

The next day after school, something happened.

“..... You've got some nerve abandoning me like that, senpai.”

I had a strange complaint from Kuroneko.

On my way home, she came running after me.

She was out of breath, probably from lack of exercise.

“Are you okay?”

“N- no problem.... Rather than that, what's going on?”

"I don't know what you're talking about. You said something about me abandoning you. Did I promise you something?"

".....Didn't you see the mail I sent you ?"⁴

"Mail? Nope, haven't seen it."

"Really?That's a peculiar story"

For some reason, Kuroneko didn't believe me. "That's a lie" her narrowing eyes said to me.

"There is no way you would miss checking your phone now. Am I wrong?"

"What the hell?"

Like a criminal in a detective novel, I was in a state of self-doubt.

I know what you're thinking.

I mean, I could get a call from Kirino studying abroad, right?

Well that's too bad! I'm not a siskon, and I'm not waiting for Kirino to call me.

I'm not worried about her! Not one bit! And besides,

"My phone is broken"

"Eh?"

"I just noticed that it won't turn on."

I opened my flip-phone and show Kuroneko the dark screen.

"Oh dear, so it is"

I have another phone at home, so it's not a problem, just a little inconvenient.

It's an old broken one that I replaced.

That peice of junk would never send emails no matter how many times I tried.

"I'm sorry, I guess you tried to contact me?"

"Y- Yeah... That is... I was hoping to meet up with you"

"Well, then it's good that we met up anyway. Did you want something?"

4 Cell phone messaging in Japan generally works via email rather than SMS

“.....”

She didn't answer right away. She turned her head and mumbled something.

“Kuroneko?”

“..... No..... It's nothing”

Somehow, she seemed depressed.

“Kukuku..... again and again..... huh..... I see how it is..... Fate wants to get in my way that badly..... No, it can't be..... could it be —— 'That kind of thing'?”

Ooh, Kuroneko has gone into her own world.

Since becoming a high school student, she's been doing this somewhat less frequently. For some reason, I feel like I miss it.

“Very well, I'll face you as many times as you like”

She gave a mysterious self-conclusion, coolly brushed up her hair and said,

“Senpai..... It's time to head to 'The promised land'”

“..... where are we going?”

I asked Kuroneko, who seemed to be on the verge of overthrowing the demon king.

“It's a cell phone store. You're taking it in for repair, aren't you?”

A very realistic answer came back.

The two of us went straight to the cell phone store to get it repaired, and left the store side by side.

I kind of went with the flow. It was too hard to ask “Why are you coming with me?”

Well, she said something about “The promised land” and it would have been unnatural to split there.

That's what I told myself.

So they gave me a loaner unit to use until the repairs were completed...

“I've lost all my data. I'm sorry, but you need to take my new phone number and email address.”

“I see, let me borrow it please”

“Sure”

“Okay, I've registered”

It was a casual exchange. A very normal distance between senpai and kouhai.

That's.... how it seemed.

“At any rate, I thought just the screen wasn't working, but it turned out to be broken in a very serious way. You didn't drop it, did you? ”

“Of course, I'm sure I didn't do anything to break it. I'm really bummed..... I can't even see the mail you sent me today.”

“You don't need to see it now..... Don't be so depressed..... Oh.....”

Kuroneko guessed,

“You could receive a message from Kirino while you're phone is broken”

“That's not it”

“Right right, even on the loaner phone, you should still receive messages from the server”

“I already tried, but it didn't work.”

“Can't you receive the emails I send?”

“Oh yeah”

Kuroneko tried various operations on my behalf, but I still couldn't receive any mail.

I couldn't receive or see the email that Kuroneko sent, let alone any email that might have come from Kirino.

It was as if such an email had never existed in the first place.

Or as if the mail that was sent had disappeared without a trace.

“Hmm...? 'The cell phone that broke for no reason' – what a mysterious story”

Kuroneko smiles thinly, amused.

The coolness of chuunibyou. Kirino would probably make fun of her.

But when Kuroneko does it with her overly tidy appearance, it's sometimes so "real" that it's frightening.

“Hey, senpai. I don't mean to offend you, but you've been victimized”

“Hmm..... Apparently our fate is being manipulated by someone with 'power'. Yes, a tremendous 'something' is about to begin——.....”

It's not “the truth that came from a lie”, but “the truth that came from chuunibyou”.

Of course, there's no way I could have foreseen it at the time.

Games club activity day.

We gather in the club room again, the first thing we do is talk about the novel game that Makabe-kun wrote the scenario for.

I also tried it —

Me:⁵ “I think it was interesting”

Sena: “I've never been a fan of novel games for boys, but I can understand why it was so well received.”

Kuroneko: “It's not to my taste, but I can see why someone might like it”

It seems that we are in general agreement.

“Really? Well then, I'm glad”

Makabe-kun seemed happy.

We now know why the president told us to play this game.

He wants Makabe-kun to take the lead creating the scenario and wants Kuroneko to learn how to do it.

He's a role model senpai.

“But... To say it was highly rated is an exaggeration. It is only compared to the other the games we've made”

Though he is humble.....

I had no idea. I didn't know that this kind-looking kouhai had a surprising talent.

5 In Japanese you can tell who's speaking by their speech patterns. In this case Kyouzuke uses “zo” masculine sentence ending, Sena uses “atashi” cutesy personal pronoun and Ruri uses “watashi”

However, as a heavy user who has been forced to play many erotic games, there are some things that bothered me.

This is about the "attributes" of the heroines in the game.

At any rate, all of the female characters in this game have the same attributes.

I asked the author to confirm the fact.

“By the way, Makabe-kun”

“Yes?”

“You like big sisters with big tits?”

“Yeah, well...”

He didn't deny it. There was no shame in his expression, and he looked like he wanted to say something.

This is an otaku-specific way of replying, which translates to “I love it” or “I want to talk about it if you'll allow me”.

I go about meeting the expectations of my nerdy kouhai with a familiar flow,

“Which do you like better, by the way? Big tits or big sisters?”

“Both of them”

“Both of them huh”

I knew you would say that.

He has all kinds of erotic figurines, including a ninja girl with big breasts and school gal games.

He was showing signs of being interested in Sena until it was discovered that she is a fujoshi.

I'm not saying where, but he would glance at them.

The president said with a straight face,

“Makabe's sister has really big breasts.”

“Boss! Please don't make misleading statements! My own sister has nothing to do with the content of this work!”

“No matter how I look at it, it's the root of your proclivity”

“Y- You're wrong! Everyone, please ignore him!”

The fact that he was in a hurry to deny it was even more suspicious.

Suddenly, I noticed that the girls were giving us icy stares,

“Uhh..... please don't engage in vulgar conversation in front of a girl”

“Senpai, looks like the two siscons are getting along well huh?”

Rude. I'm not a siscon.

And Sena, you're definitely the most vulgar person in the club, no..... in this school.

When I accused her with a look, she took no notice and moved on to the next topic,

“By the way, who drew the illustrations for this game?”

“A third-year female member of the club. She's not here right now”

“I didn't know there was such a person...well, she's as good as a pro...can she draw our work too?”

“She quit the club already”

“Ehh~..... What was the reason?”

“Maybe it's because Makabe made her draw all those erotic illustrations with big tits?”

“Don't you dare blame this on me!”

“Because you showed her the Tai●nin⁶ figure and said 'Please make it look like this!'”

“You're the worst, Makabe-senpai”

“Aaaargh my image as a 'refreshing senpai' is being damaged! Th- that isn't right! The senpai who drew the illustrations for the game had been drawing comics at Comiket for a long time, and quit because she was assigned an editor! It has nothing to do with the fact that I lent her that figure as reference material!”

So it was true that he lent it to her.

“Makabe-senpai, that's gross”

"Urgh..."

Makabe-kun was gasping in agony.

Poor guy's favorability rating with Sena is taking a pounding.

The president spoke as if to summarize the exchange that had just taken place,

“Well, I think you can understand that Makabe made this game with his full propensity”

“That's why it has so much 'soul' to it. Even though I'm not a target user of this game, I could feel it”

6 Presumably a reference to Taimanin – a hentai franchise (with big tits)

The president nodded at Kuroneko's statement.

“He's good at doing what he likes. But this time, Makabe will have to be a bit more patient. Only one big sister heroine”

“Huh?”

At that moment, a quiet and serious kouhai leaked out a terrifying voice.

If I were to make fun of little sisters towards Kirino, she would react in the same way.

I got scared too.

“..... Calm down, Makabe. Whoa there”

“I'm not angry at you, okay? But I wonder if you can give me a satisfactory explanation as to why you would say such a thing?”

You're angry. The president said without fear,

“Because the next game should pave the way for the first-years. Let's say everything goes well and we make an amazing big-sister game here. Makabe, who loves big sisters with big boobs, is the main focus. After you graduate, all you'll leave behind for your juniors will be the achievement of making an amazing big-sister game”

“.....I'm convinced. I'm surprised you're thinking about this properly, boss.”

“What do you think I am?”

“You're a garbage creator who only makes shitty games no matter how many times I admonish you”

“You've got to tone down your tsukkomi!”⁷

The president has suffered so much mental damage that his body is turned upside down.

“Gah!” he shouted,

“You know, when I'm not the main creator, I can think objectively! When I try to make something I like, I go insane without realising it!”

I understand! Sena nodded emphatically.

It may be a common story for those who have experience in making things.

Even so, Sena takes it way too far!

“Ahem! Anyway——”

7 Literally comes from “to butt in”- refers to the act of criticising ridiculous or silly things in manzai comedy. For example, Kyousuke often plays the tsukkomi role in Oreimo by calling out the jokes

The president says, while writing on the whiteboard with a pen.

“There are four heroines: an older sister, a younger sister, a classmate, and one other. Do not change this”

Yes, Makabe-kun nodded.

“And Gokou, this is a request as head of planning”

“Yes?”

“What we are going to make is a gal game without battle elements. I'd like you to create a scenario that will make everyone who plays it think, 'This heroine is cute' or 'This is so moe!' - I don't mind people dying, but it's better if they don't. Avoid *harsh* language and plot twists, and always try to have a happy ending. Make the text lighter overall, more conversation-driven, and bring it closer to Makabe's.”

“.....”

That would not be something that Kuroneko would like or want to do.

But I guess it's necessary for the game we're going to make together.

She kept her eyes down, thought for a moment, looked up and answered.

“I've never done it before, so, I'll learn how to do it”

“Great, please do”

It was a line that Kuroneko of a while ago would never have said.

The president slammed the table with both hands, raising the tension in the place,

“Come on, you guys— I'm sure you've been thinking about what kind of story you want to tell! We'll decide today!”

Makabe: “It's almost summer, so I'm thinking about a story set in summer!”

“... Well, it's a classic”

“It will be great, we can include a swimsuit event without too much trouble”

Me: “If it's a school thing, maybe there's a school by the ocean?”⁸

president: “Why don't we set it on an island? Make it a boarding school or something”

Makabe: “I don't think so. Since the heroines will be the hero's sisters, they would have to attend the same school”

“What's the problem?”

8 It's really hard to tell who's speaking around this exchange, I could be wrong

“You will only be able to set ages up to three years apart. This makes it difficult to have a younger sister in elementary school or an older sister in college.”

“Wow. Makabe-senpai, you already have the characterization in mind~”

“Fuu.....**Island folklore.....A gruesome incident** the residents are hiding..... **Areas closed off** due to typhoons.....Unnaturally **mutilated corpses**.....Kukuku.....Things are getting interesting!”

“Kuroneko, Kuroneko, isn't that direction no good? Did you listen to what the president said?”

“A- a little mystery element is okay right?”

“Are 'mutilated corpses' a little mystery element?”

We discussed ideas in a lively manner.

The president writes them down on the whiteboard, and Makabe-kun types them into the computer.

I'm an amateur, but I participated in the discussion——

Haha..... I'm now in my third year, but I'm enjoying the club activities.

Eventually, all of our opinions came together, and the outline of the game to be created began to take shape.

“Here, I have a suggestion!”

The president distracted everyone with a loud voice.

“When summer vacation comes, let's go to the islands of the Seto Inland Sea for location hunting!”

““““Location hunting?””””

The voices of everyone except the president hummed. Sena asks on behalf of the others,

“Does that mean it's a field trip?”

“Yeah, it's like a research camp for the games club. The period is one week. My granny runs a guest house as a hobby, so accommodation is free including three meals. The transport cost can be covered by the club budget, but I can't cover everything, so you'll have to pay for part of it. — What do you think?”

.....

The place fell silent.

Everyone was pondering over the sudden proposal.

No, but, anyway——

“Suspicious!”

Sena shouted out what I was thinking.

“The conditions are too good to be true! Free accommodation for a week. It's not that easy to get a deal like that! When I think back, even during the meeting, you wanted it to be set on an island! That was the very first thing you said, wasn't it!”

She pointed her finger at him with the force of a young female prosecutor.

“Boss— What is it you're planning!?”

“.....Hey hey..... Don't make it sound like a plot. We're a very indoor club, and we don't have the same kind of youthfulness as an athletics club, right? So, I thought it would be nice to have a proper normie⁹ event once in a while, at least for the last summer vacation. That's all!”

“Boss..... Is that really true?”

Makabe-kun is on the verge of being persuaded.

This kouhai of mine has a tendency to get carried away, despite his cool tsukkomi.

I'm sure this is how he always gets involved in the production of shitty games.

“Uwa, Makabe-senpai is soft. Hey Gokou-san, isn't it suspicious?”

“.....To start with, staying out for a week isn't normally possible for me”

“Ah—..... in that case, me being the only girl seems kinda dangerous”

The girls were whispering to each other.

It looks like this trip is either going to be cancelled or it's going to be boys only.

Just as I was thinking this, the president hooked his arm around my neck and yanked.

“Hey, what is it, boss! Sena is watching with bloodshot eyes, can you please stop?”

“Kousaka, I need you to convince Gokou to come to the research camp. If you don't, it's unlikely the girls will join us.”

He whispered into my ear.

“Yeah..... No, you don't have to force them to go. If we go with just the guys...”

“.....Kousaka— You want to spend spend the night at the beach with your girlfriend don't you?”

“Girlfriend? What are you talking about?”

“Aren't you going out with Gokou?”

9 He uses “ria juu” which is basically the Japanese slang equivalent of “normie”

“Huh? We're not going out——”

I really didn't understand what he meant.

Do the games club think me and Kuroneko are dating?

Certainly, if that misunderstanding is the premise, I can understand the words and actions of the president ...

When I denied it, the president seemed quite surprised.

“Honestly, I don't really know myself, but all the other member assured me there was 'no doubt'”

“.....”

No, well, sure.

I joined the club with her.

We made games together in my room. Supporting her for the competition.

Even now, I'm participating in club meetings like this——

In retrospect, all my actions are like Kuroneko's boyfriend!

Ohh! I'm suddenly embarrassed!

My face is so hot!

“Ruri-chan, look! Kousaka-senpai is blushing as he tangles with the president!”

“Hey! Stop looking at me with evil eyes! ”

As I shouted angrily at the fujoshi, the president didn't care and continued our private conversation.

“Okay so you're not dating, but don't you want to date her?”

“.....Wha-.....”

More of the love talk?

“If you're into that kind of thing this camp is a good opportunity for you. It's in the countryside, but that's why the ocean is so beautiful, and in the summer, there are plenty of places to go for a date”

I'll cooperate as much as I can——

For the rest of club activities that day, I was distracted the whole time.

When I got home, I lay in bed in my room, clutching my head in distress.

Me, Kuroneko.....don't I want to date her?

Aaaaaa! I don't know!

Well, recently she.....

— 'Nii-san', let's play a game together.

— Baka, my sister would never talk like that.

There were times when she acted as if she was interested in me.....

— Yoroshiku-onaishimasu, 'senpai'¹⁰

I think the distance between us changed drastically after we became senpai and kouhai.

From my sister's friend— to a “close female kouhai”.

But she.....

— You shouldn't do things that might give men the wrong idea.

— Or maybe you really do like me?

— I like you.

—Wha!?

— I like you... as much as your sister likes you.

In other words, I thought she meant “not at all”.

However, according to the objective opinion of the games club members, me and Kuroneko are as good as dating.

¹⁰ From when she first encountered Kyouzuke at school

“Aah~~~~~ shit! I don't know!”

I have no idea how Kuroneko feels.

Does she like me? Not really?

In fact, I don't even know how I feel.

What do I think about Kuroneko?

A cute kouhai? My sister's important friend?

Or..... A girl I'm interested in?

“Well..... I'm interested in her, of course. She's younger than me, but she's beautiful..... and her interests seem to match mine lately. Besides.....”

It's fun being with her. I always want to be by her side. I want these times to last forever.

But does that mean I “like” her?

Is it a romantic feeling?

Do I want to— go out with Kuroneko?

With my lack of experience, I don't even know what I'm doing. When I think about Kuroneko, my face gets hot and flushed, and my mind just gets all jumbled up.

Like after a bath. Or like when you catch a cold.

—It was as if I was sick.

“Haaah.....”

That's when I let out a long, hot sigh.

“Kyouzuke!”

And then my mom called out to me with a loud voice.

.....What is it? It's not a good time for this.....

I scratched my head and stood up, though I was a million miles away. As I opened the door and stepped out into the hallway, I heard a voice call out again, “Kyouzuke!” - It seemed that my mother hadn't moved from downstairs and was still calling me.

“Kyouzuke! Your phone's ringing! It's 'Gokou Ruri-san'!”

“I'm coming!”

Dash! I rushed down the stairs and got the phone from my mom.

“Yes, This is Kousaka!”

I hurried back to my room while talking into my phone.

My mother was grinning with her assumptions, but there was no time to correct her.

I ran into my room and closed the door. Then I heard her voice.

“Um..... Senpai..... Do you have a moment?”

“Y- yeah! I do! I have time!”

“R- right”

What am I saying? Kuroneko seemed surprised.

I'm being too impatient. I'm so stupid..... it's just a phone call right?

“Um.....”

Kuroneko also seemed nervous for some reason. Her voice was stiff.

“It's about the..... research camp that was mentioned at club”

“O- oh”

“Senpai..... are you going?”

“I was planning to”

I will go to the camp regardless of whether or not Kuroneko comes too. When I told her, she asked me curiously,

“Why? Aren't you sitting exams?”

“Thanks for worrying about me. But as far as exams go, I'm pretty confident I can afford to go”

“.....Really”

“Yeah. So, I want to participate..... to gather data for the game we're making. It's going to be a model for the scenario”

“B- but you don't need to—— ”

“Yes, I do. I'm also a member of the club. If I can't be useful elsewhere, I'll have to be useful here.”

“.....”

I heard a surprised sigh through the phone.

“If you guys can't come, I'll go to see it myself and take some pictures. What kind of place it is, what the location is like. I'll try to find places that could be used in the scenario. I'll check it out and report back”

“.....Th- thank you. That would be very helpful”

“You don't need to thank me. I'm doing it because I enjoy it. If it helps, that's fine”

I'm not saying that to sound cool.

I sound like an eroge heroine—

I'm not doing this because of you.

“.....I see..... Senpai is..... going to research camp”

“Yeah. You— can't come I guess. Well, you have your reasons”

I'm curious, but I need to sit back and listen.

“.....”

A moment of silence. I dared to keep quiet and wait for her words.

I had a feeling that she might have something to say.

“.....Senpai..... It's..... meaningless to say this..... but”

“What is it? Tell me”

“If I said..... I would go too”

“I'm glad”

I said gruffly. Then Kuroneko said with a surprised tone,

“.....Is.....that so?”

“I haven't had an opportunity like this before. I'm looking forward to the trip. It would be more fun if a good friend was coming with. —No, I'm sorry. You said circumstances meant you can't come.”

“Itterasshai!”¹¹

“Whoa!”

I quickly pulled the phone away from my ear.

I heard the loud voice of a girl who is not Kuroneko.

“Wa- wait a minute Hinata..... give that back..... before it's too late. I was calling..... ”

“Nononono! Dad, hold onto Ruri-nee! Ah, you're Kyousuke Kousaka right! You're always looking after my sister!”

11 Literally “please go and come back” - like saying “take care!” to someone who's leaving

The personality of this girl— So much has been conveyed from just this exchange.

Even with the phone far away from my ear, I can still hear her shrill voice.

“Ah, ah..... I certainly am Kyouzuke Kousaka..... and you are.....”

“I'm Hinata Gokou! I'm Ruri Gokou's little Sister! Ya—y!”

“Ah, I see”

I had heard she has a little sister.....

The personalities of these sisters are too different.

“I've heard the story! Ruri-nee..... About Ruri-onee-chan! To let her go to research camp! The whole family will help! I'll entrust onee-chan to you Kousaka-san! Please do this for me!”

“O- oh?”

This girl is ridiculously pushy.

“Sorry, can you explain a bit more?”

“Roger! Uh~~~Well! Onee-chan always does a lot of stuff for us! She's always taking good care of us and dad and worrying about us! So, she said she's not going to the camp because she's worried about the family and can't leave the house for a week, or she's worried about wasting money on transportation, or some other stupid reason like that! You must be joking I thought! So I want to ask Kousaka-san, who's always looking after her, to take her there! I'm sorry I'm not a good speaker— Did you get that!?”

Don't talk all at once.

But,

“I got the message! Leave it to me!”

“I'll leave it to you!”

Hinata Gokou seems to be this kind of girl.

She's a very considerate little sister.

Haha, I laughed.

Then, apparently somebody stole the cell phone. “Ah!” a voice said.

“.....Senpai. It's me”

“Oh, isn't your little sister cute”

“.....Baka.Um..... About what was said——”

“I don't know what the circumstances are at your house but—— you have a nice family”

“..... Yeah”

A happy voice.

“If you like, let's go together, to the camp”

“.....”

The silence was a sign of her confliction.

It showed her feelings for her family.

Through the phone, I faintly heard a gentle man's voice telling her to go.

Then, she gave me her answer.

“Yoroshiku-onegaishimasu, senpai”

Chapter 2

The middle of July has passed and the long-awaited summer vacation has arrived.

It was sunny and cloudless outside. It was a perfect day for a trip.

“Vi—— ctory!”

I look up at the sky from the gate of our house and protect my eyes from the sunlight with one hand.

I put my backpack back on and set off for the research camp.

Just then, the door to my house opens and my mother appears.

I wonder if I forgot something.

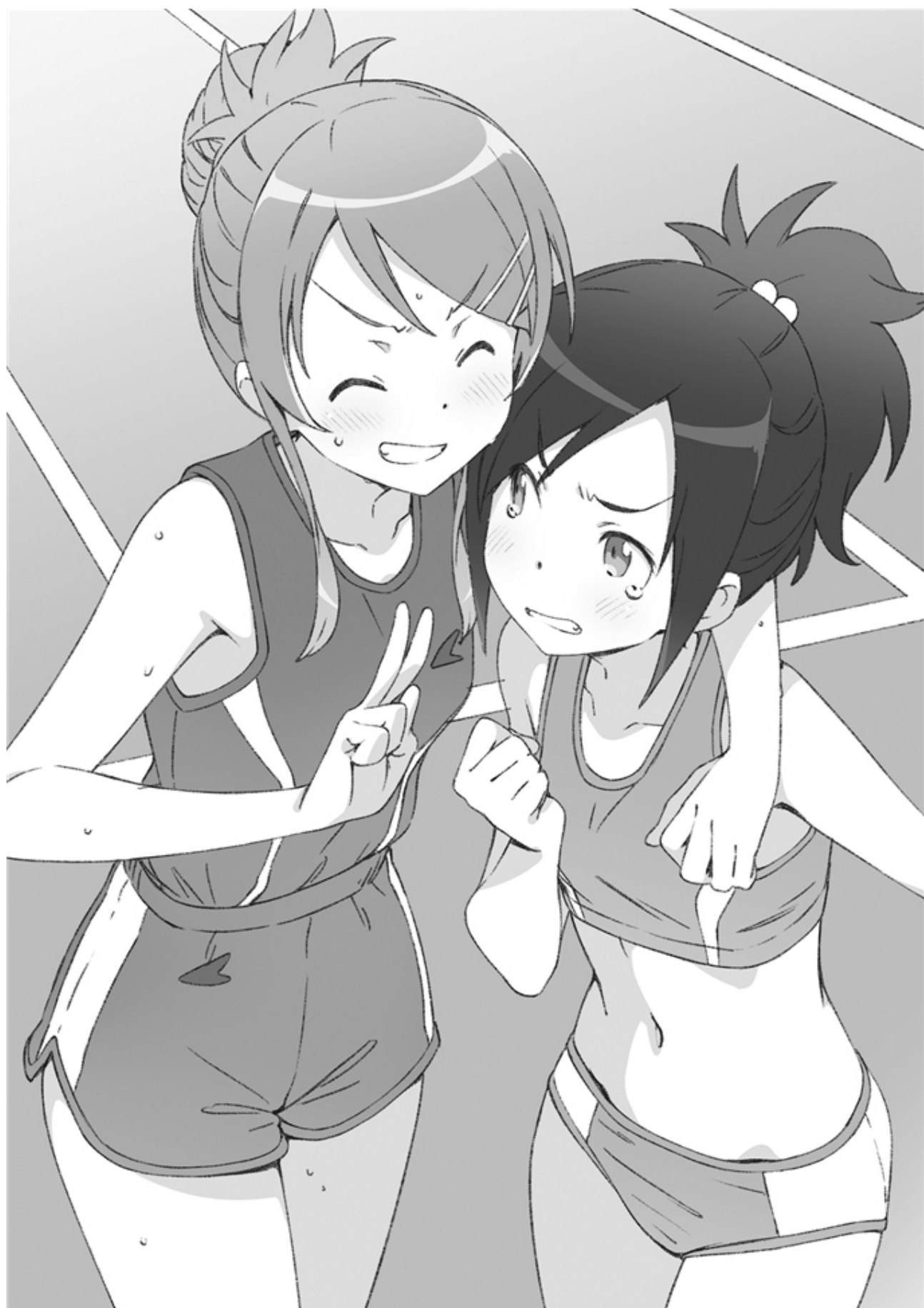
What's going on? I asked with a look.

“Kyouzuke, I just got a call from Kirino—— she has a message for you”

“Huh? Why didn't you just give me the phone?”

“She was kind of mad at you—— so I'll just tell you:”

“I won on my own! Baa———aka!”



“That's what she said”

“Huh~? What the hell is that”

I don't have enough information.

With this message, I don't even know who you won against or why.

I don't even know why you're telling me this.

“That Kirino, she's irrationally angry as always”

“Did you do something to her~?”

“I didn't do anything”

That bitch. *I've been wondering why she hasn't contacted me at all*, and this is the first message she sends to her brother.

Damn it! She's pouring water on my fresh departure!

Now I'm feeling really frustrated for no reason.

“Mom. Next time she calls, give her a message.”

“Yes yes. —What?”

I grinned and told her,

“*Great job!* Baa——aka!”

Waving to my family, I set out.

My heart is as light as a feather.

I felt like I could fly overseas.

Suddenly, I pictured my sister in my mind.

Kirino looked pissed off, blegh~~~! and stuck out her tongue.

Members of the games club were already gathering at Chiba station. The head of the club spotted me and waved at me. I'm grateful for tall people, because they can be a good landmark in such situations.

“Good morning”

“Hey” “Good morning, Kousaka-senpai”

Makabe-kun, who was standing next to the president, bowed his head.

If I told him, he would be angry, but his big backpack made me smile, as if he were going hiking.

The president, on the other hand, was dressed lightly. He had the dignity of a seasoned traveller.

And then——

“Yo, Kousaka”

I have to tell you about this guy.

“You came too after all, Akagi?”

I smiled and returned the greeting.

Kohei Akagi. My classmate and friend, and Sena's older brother.

A retired soccer club member and a good sportsman. Of course, he is not a member of the games club.

I wonder why he's coming to the research camp.

“I can't just let Sena go alone to a camp where boys are also participating. If you don't mind, I'll come too”

That's why. This siscon bastard has been saying the same thing since June when he found out about the camp, so the president allowed him to participate as a special case.

“Akagi, you..... really should take a lesson from me and get away from your sister a little”

“What are you saying? Isn't your sister studying abroad? If I were in your position, I'd die of worry”

“I'm sure. ——But Sena must be ashamed to have her big brother following her, she seemed angry”

“She's just hiding her embarrassment. Really she's happy to be with me”

He's a jolly guy.

Well, personally, I'm happy that there's a guy I get along with.

Of all the members in the club, I have the least otaku knowledge. When I can't keep up with the conversation, with Akagi there who also doesn't know much about games, I'll be somewhat relieved.

I'm sure he'll be able to keep control of Sena's antics too.

——As I was thinking this, my mind drifted away from my friend and towards my surroundings.

.....Hasn't arrived yet..... I guess?

“What wrong Kousaka, looking for something?”

“Nah..... Nothing.....”

“Ah”

Akagi grinned knowingly.

“That girl, was with my sister earlier—— See, looks like she's coming”

“Eh?”

Looking where Akagi pointed with his thumb, the figures of Sena and——

Kuroneko were coming towards us.

“.....”

I'm speechless.

Not the familiar gothic lolita. Not the school uniform that I see so often these days.

She was wearing a summery white one-piece dress.

The ephemeral impression is still there, but it's as if all the usual painfulness has been converted into neatness.

Pure white, the exact opposite of her usual image.

“Kuroneko.....?”

“.....Who else do you see?”

“No, you..... look——”

“.....Wh- what is it?”

Kuroneko, whose atmosphere had changed completely from usual, looked away slightly and asked me.

I stared at her intently.

“Amazing- I think it's really good”

“R- really.....”

When I complimented her, she turned bright red and looked down.

Even that gesture made me dizzy.

“Ruri-chan! You did it!”

A voice interrupted the good mood. It was Sena.

She boastfully puffed up her large chest.

“I picked it out, after all!”

“It was your taste huh”

It's not the kind of clothes Kuroneko would willingly buy.

You did well. I will praise you.

“We went shopping together to buy clothes for camp! Look at my clothes, too! Aren't they so cute?”

“Yeah, it's nice isn't it?”

In her casual clothes she also had a different image from what I saw at school, which was refreshing. I think she's attractive enough to be approached when she walks down the street.

It was overshadowed by seeing Kuroneko just before.

“Ah- such thoughtless praise. Hmm, that's right. Kousaka-senpai can only see Ruri-chan right-?”

“H- hang on.....”

Kuroneko was shyly tugging on Sena's arm.

Still, Sena's mouth didn't stop.

“The outfit I picked out for you, it's working even better than I expected— mphmphmph”

“P- please shut up..... geez”

Sena, her mouth covered by Kuroneko, mumbled and groaned.

“Honestly..... you're such a chatterbox”

Those two really—

They've gotten so close in just a few months.

We took the Sobu Line from Chiba Station to Tokyo Station—.

From there, we transferred to the Shinkansen. The underground of Tokyo Station is wide and complicated, with many people coming and going.¹²

12 Shinkansen AKA the bullet train

If you're a little off guard, you might get lost.

Keeping an eye on Kuroneko, I made my way to the Shinkansen platform.

As soon as I arrived at the platform, the president said,

“Alright, I'll give you the ticket and you can sit in the seat written on the ticket.”

The otakus busily crowded onto the train.

The seating order must have been chosen by the president. The Akagi siblings were seated next to each other, which showed consideration.

As for me——

“Ah..... Senpai and I are..... next to each other..... aren't we”

“Y- yeah. Looks like we are”

.....Geez. I guess the president took care of this, too.....

I feel strangely embarrassed, or perhaps awkward.

If we depart like this, I might die.

I mean, what am I supposed to talk about for the next few hours? No, normally I can carry on a conversation as naturally as I like—— but when it's set up like this!

It makes you nervous! You can't help but be aware of it!

Damnit..... wh- what to do..... what should I do.....!

I anguished intensely for a few seconds——

“All right, let's turn the seat and make it a four-seater!”¹³

Phew..... Now the Akagi siblings are with us.

Man what a relief.

When Sena noticed my behavior, she narrowed her eyes,

“.....Kousaka-senpai you wuss——”

Shut up.

13 Seats on the Shinkansen can rotate to face backwards or forwards

That's why the four of us, me, Kuroneko, Akagi and Sena, are sitting together.

If you look around, you'll see that the other club members have turned their seats into group seats, just like us.

One group immediately took out a box of board games, while another tried to play a trading card game.¹⁴

The lack of standard games such as UNO and playing cards is to be expected.

The one thing they all have in common is that they are all ready to play as hard as they can.

It looks like a lot of fun.

I don't dislike this aspect of the games club.

“Ah geez..... The inside of this carriage instantly became like a card shop ... That's why the otaku trip is ——”

Sena speaks in such an unpleasant tone, but I don't think she really feels bad.

I want to do it too. I'm jealous. Your eyes are sparkling. It's obvious.

“Hey, Kousaka. You should introduce us.”

Akagi said as he lifted his sister's suitcase onto the luggage rack.

Oops, of course, is this the first time he and Kuroneko have met?

Ah-..... damn it.

We got cornered and ended up in a four-seater, it may have been a mistake.

Because,

“.....”

See, I knew it.

Kuroneko is a shy person.

When faced by a boy she's never met before, she would look down and stay silent.

Well, what should I do.....

“Kuroneko, this guy is Kohei Akagi, Sena's brother. He's also my friend. He looks tough, but he's not a bad guy, so don't worry. And—— Akagi, this girl is Ruri Gokou, Sena's classmate and friend. Don't get too close”

14 How many club members are there? I thought the only others were Makabe and Gennosuke? Maybe the twins?

I waited for everyone to take their seats and introduced them briefly at first.

Depending on how Kuroneko responded, I would follow up.

“Yoroshiku, Gokou-san”

Akagi greeted her with a smile.

Kuroneko also gave a little bow, though it was a stiff movement,

“I'm Ruri Gokou. Yo- yoroshiku onegai..... shimasu”

Ooh..... she introduced herself properly. I was worried that she might not be able to reply, but I'm sorry for doubting you, Kuroneko.

From the current exchange, Akagi seemed to have guessed that Kuroneko was not used to boys.

He throws the question to me, instead of her,

“Kousaka, I don't know if I should ask, but what is 'Kuroneko'?”

Ah, I see. If I don't explain it properly, you won't understand.

“Well..... Kuroneko is Gokou's handle..... You know what I mean? We met at an internet meetup. So, that's why I still use it outside of school”

“Ho..... You met a younger girl at an 'internet meetup”

“Hey, you're misunderstanding..... it's not like that”

When I looked at him coldly, Akagi laughed,

“Well, that's not Kousaka's character. And, so?”

“It's related to my sister”

“Ah..... Kirino-chan, right?”

Calling her that is kind of annoying, but I answer without showing it on my face,

“Yeah. So I've known her for a while, but this year she enrolled in our school. I was surprised, too”

“Huh.”

Then briefly, the conversation stopped.

I'm sure he has a lot of questions he wants to ask, but the fact that he holds back is probably the humanity of the man named Kohei Akagi.

A glance from Kuroneko,

“Akagi-senpai”

“Yeah, what's up?”

“I often hear Sena talking about her 'proud onii-chan”

“Seriously!? Sena-chan does that!?”

Akagi got very excited about the topic of his little sister.

Sena raised her voice in a panic,

“Hey! Ruri-chan!?”

“Kukuku..... Even for this research camp, Sena was overjoyed 'My onii-chan will come with me”

“I'm not happy! It's too gross because he's such a siscon! Ruri-chan, that's what I said! I never said that I was happy about it!”

“That's right— Usually anyway, you were always complaining about your brother coming to camp”

“See! See!”

“But, it was obvious you were happy”

“I'm not happy!”

Sena's tone collapsed in embarrassment.

No, I guess that's it.

Akagi, on the other hand, seemed very happy that his sister was talking about her brother to her friends without his knowledge.

“I see~~~~ Sena-chan talks about me~~~~”

He's gone all dere-dere. ¹⁵

As a fellow older brother, I don't want to be like that.

Don't think that I'm envious that he gets praised by his little sister.

.....Seriously.

Oops, anyway— I don't mean to divert the conversation to my sister—

Thanks to the topic that Kuroneko brought up, before I knew it, the air of this four-seater had become a fun and lively atmosphere.

It was something she had aimed to do for the sake of the others sitting with her.

15 *dere dere* 'to become affectionate' — *tsun tsun* 'to turn away in disgust or anger' — *tsundere* 'Kirino Kousaka'

“.....Haha”

A laugh escaped.

A feeling of pride and, an unfamiliar feeling, arose and swirled in my chest.

Eventually, Sena, who had been making a racket, regained her composure.

She said with a half-joking, snarky attitude,

“Hmm, I see~. Ruri-chan would do that to me, her best friend—! Well if that's the case, I also have an idea——”

“.....Fuu..... What's that you say?”

“Ruri-chan's embarrassing episode will be revealed!”

“Wha.....”

Kuroneko's eyes widened as she was faced with an unexpected counter attack.

This is getting interesting!

I was excited to see what would happen.

“Hey hey Kousaka-senpai. Doesn't Ruri-chan look super cute in the outfit I picked out for her——”

“Well, sure”

“This girl, honestly, was wearing different clothes at first today—. She said the dress I chose was too embarrassing ”

“What..... That's.....”

Kuroneko relievedly stroked her chest. Apparently, The episode that Sena was about to reveal was not embarrassing for her.

“Of course.The result..... it..... was good—— but, wearing something like this, for me..... I'm not used to it.....it felt awkward”

“So you wore something different”

“Yeah, I put something on over this dress. That's all it is”

What. When you hear that much, it sounds like a really insignificant episode.....

Sena's shoulders dropped in dismay.

“Wow, this girl still doesn't get it..... In that case, why don't you show Kousaka-senpai—— the 'outfit' you were wearing when you showed up at the meeting place this morning”

Outfit?

As I tilted my head, Kuroneko quickly said,

“Very well. Look closely senpai, at the figure of this magical artifact I crafted by hand”

Whoosh

'Something black' fluttered in front of me, blocking my view for a moment. When I next saw Kuroneko, she had changed her appearance, just like a magical girl who has completed her transformation.

Wow, that's a shady look.

“.....Wha- what's that?”

I asked frankly. Then she said with a proud voice,

“It's a 「necromancer robe」 . Fuu..... isn't it pretty cool”¹⁶

“.....O- ooh”

It's incredibly difficult to react..... I have to explain.

Kuroneko was wearing a black robe, just like the ones worn by evil wizards in video games. When the hood was pulled down, it almost hid her face.

This person is shady man.

If it was a fortune teller's house or something, but on the Shinkansen, I can only see a suspicious person.

“See, see! Don't you think it was a good move on my part to get her out of this stuffy cosplay costume?”

That's right. Sena did a really good job.

I'll think carefully and say something that won't make me lie.

“Well..... That look suits you but..... I think it looked better before”

“R- really.....”

Kuroneko pulled on her hood, hiding her face even more.

The journey continued smoothly————

¹⁶ She says “necromancer robe” in English

Now we're on the deck of a ferry heading for the island.

A sea breeze blew in from ahead. It stings my face, but under the searing sunshine, it is rather cool and pleasant,

“Man, I should've brought my sunglasses”

Casually, I look at Kuroneko next to me.

I'm sure she'll be fine, but..... she's small and light, and I was worried she might get blown away by the wind if she wasn't careful.

She is now struggling to hold her skirt down with one hand.

Ah—ah—..... this is getting kind of, risky.

Fortunately, no one was paying attention to us. I casually moved to a position that blocked the wind, and Kuroneko let out a sigh of relief.

“.....I'm saved”

“Yeah. Should we go back down?”

“No, it's a rare opportunity, let's 'experience' it properly. This 'roaring wind”

“I see. It's for research camp”

If the game is going to be set on an island, the experience on the deck will be useful.

It could be used for a slightly naughty scene—I thought but didn't say it.

“Whoa, I can see the island!”

Akagi shouted in high spirits and pointed ahead.

Everyone within earshot of his voice sees the same thing he does and cheers.

It's our destination, “Inumaki Island”¹⁷

The sun was still high in the sky, even though it was almost evening.

The boat continued on, and soon the outline of the island became clearer.

The entire island is mostly mountains and forests. Towns are spread out along the sea.

It was a small island that could be explored on foot if time permitted.

And yet, it looked so mysterious with the clouds behind it.

¹⁷ Seems to be a fictional location, unusual for Oreimo.

When we got off the ferry, we were greeted by a harbor lined with fishing boats.

There was nothing touristy about this place. Instead, there was the rich scent of nature, the chorus of cicadas, and the gaze of an odd number of stray cats.

“Oh-, feels like I've returned home”

The president looked around the island lovingly. It seems that this island is his home.

“Heh..... it has quite an unreal feeling, it might be a good place to set a game”

“Right, Makabe? If you go into the mountains, there are shrines and rivers, and at night, the beach is not bad. There are plenty of good locations that could be used for a gal game. You wouldn't have seen any of these places if you were in Tokyo”

As Makabe-kun and the president were talking, Sena looked up at the mountain.

“Wow, once you get to the island, there's even more nature. I can't even see a single convenience store! I can't believe it! It's a tough location for an indoor girl living in the city-”

“Sena-chan, I'm going to get some juice from the vending machine. Wait for me in the shade there”

They each shared their first impressions of the island, but maybe you noticed.

All of them are talking under the assumption that Chiba is a city, the same as Tokyo.

The people of Chiba have that in common.

“Well, everyone got off. We didn't forget anything. —Let's go!”

The president leading the club members seemed like a teacher leading students, which was strangely funny.

We walk behind the president like a procession of ants.

Me and Kuroneko are last. She is pulling a rattling trunk.

But..... She's not sweating at all.

It was the same at summer comiket.

Even though she looks like a snow-spirit¹⁸..... is she strong against heat?

If her pure white skin gets sunburned, wouldn't that be terrible?

The meddlesome bug started to buzz.

18 “Yuki-onna” - literally “snow woman” is a youkai in Japanese folklore

“Are you okay in the sun? Should I take your luggage?”

“It's no problem. Didn't I tell you before? I surround my body with a thin film of spiritual energy so I don't get hot”

.....For a moment, I thought it might be true. But, worrisome things are worrisome.

It seemed that my inner thoughts were transmitted, and Kuroneko turned away as if embarrassed.

“If you insist, let's stack some extra defence”

Kuroneko took out a parasol from nowhere and unfolded it.

She really looks like a young lady when she does that in her white dress.

She looked different from her usual impression, and my heart raced again.

“.....Um, senpai?”

“Huh?”

When I asked her back with a dumb face, she approached me holding out her parasol,

“.....With two people..... I wonder”

“.....”

There was a moment of silence.

“I- I'm just saying.....”

“Ah, wait, no”

I quickly reached out my hand, but touched hers as she tried to withdraw the parasol, and we both got nervous. We looked flustered at each other for a few seconds before I said,

“Then..... I'll take it”

“.....Please”

That's how it turned out.

Under the sunny sky, we walked together under the same umbrella.

It was an act to beat the heat, but it might have had the opposite effect.

As we walked up the hill, we were looking down on the ocean, which was a nice view.

The sun, which had been sitting for a long time, finally seemed ready to set, and the sky turned

orange.

The first day of camp was almost over with just travelling.

But even at night, there's still a lot of fun left to be had.

That's what a camp is all about.

Eventually, we arrived at our destination.

The guest house we're staying at, "Miura-inn", is an old-fashioned two-story building.

With the ocean directly in front of us, the location is not bad.

When I opened the sliding door at the entrance, there was a nostalgic scent.

.....Ah, that's right.

It's similar to the Tamura family, where my childhood friend lives.

The smell of a Grandma's house.

The entrance is only slightly larger than a normal house, and when the club members are all packed in at once, it becomes instantly cramped.

I noticed an old-fashioned pink telephone on the reception desk.

.....I think this might be the first time I've seen a phone with no buttons.

We noisily took off our shoes and changed into slippers.

We were greeted by a white-haired woman wearing a kappogi.¹⁹

“Welcome, everyone. My grandson is indebted to you”

She must be president Miura's grandmother. She has his face.

“Baa-chan, I'm home. I've brought some reliable helpers with me”

“My my..... it's a great help to have so many young people on hand”

Unable to overlook this exchange, Makabe-kun reacted by my side,

“Boss, what do you mean..... helpers?”

“Didn't I tell you? Actually, I wanted you guys to help prepare for the annual 'traditional festival' we have here on the island.”

“This is the first I've heard of it!”

19 A type of smock or apron with sleeves

“See, I knew there was more to it!”

Makabe-kun and Sena got upset.

“Hey, Gennosuke!”

“Ouch! What baa-chan”

When the president complained about being hit on the back of the head, his grandma— missus, tutted angrily to scold her grandson.²⁰

“You didn't tell them anything! I asked you to help me! Grandpa was in charge of the festival preparations, but he hurt his back, and the young people who helped us last year have moved to Tokyo, so there's not many people who can do the heavy lifting this year! How could you expect your friends to do this when you brought them here without telling them!”

Wow! I thought she was a kind old lady, but she's scary when she's angry!

The president, frightened, replied,

“Ah, someone needs to carry the portable shrine, right? I can't replace my ex-fisherman grandpa! I can only carry a few dozen doujinshi with my thin arms.”

He can carry a surprising amount.

But his arms are so pale and skinny.

He pulled his skinny arm around Akagi's, who was standing next to him.

“Look baa-chan! These strong arms trained in a sports club! They're as big as my thighs!”

“Miura-san, you especially allowed me to participate..... don't tell me.....”

Akagi was dumbfounded with narrowing eyes. The president continued with no shame,

“Yeah, as you can see——”

“You just wanted onii-chan's body didn't you!”

Sena put her hands over her mouth and let out a high pitched shriek. She looked super happy.

“Stop with that disgusting language! I wanted help because I can't do this alone!”

“If that's the case, you should have said so from the start. It's a small price to pay”

Akagi said something suave.

“Right, Kousaka?”

Now he's dumping me in it.

20 He refers to the woman as “okami-san” - an old-fashioned term for “wife” which is still used for inn-keepers

“I- I guess so”

Honestly, I'm not as confident with manual labour as Akagi.....

Kuroneko was watching, so I had to play it cool.

“I knew you'd say that! My brothers!”

The president spoke with such excitement, the missus pulled his ear.

“.....Phew, I thought that would be the case. Hahaa, good thing”

Makabe-kun and the other male members were generally supportive.

Somehow, the president seems to be well liked.

Or rather, as Akagi said— it's a small price to pay.

Even though these otaku boys are estranged from manual labour, we have plenty of manpower.

At least, for the most part, it should be okay.

Somehow..... I even wondered if this was an excuse for the president.

If we were offered a week's accommodation for nothing.

Or if it was proposed in advance that we should help prepare for the festival.

I might have had a hard time with that too.

Expecting it to be bad, I might have hesitated.

You could say that.

We thought “*There seems to be something more to this, so we don't need to worry about participating in the research camp*”

That's why.

The missus was thankful and told us various things about the festival preparations.

In short, they needed help with the heavy lifting because they were short on men.

It was a kind of part-time job setting up the venue— Makabe represented us, and again, all the male members expressed their desire to help. We were enthusiastically offered payment for our work, but of course we firmly refused.

“It's bad to make only the boys work”

Kuroneko muttered.

“I wish there was something we could do to help too”

“I know right—”

The female members agreed with Kuroneko and were discussing something.

The results will be revealed the next morning, but for now I have no way of knowing what.

By the way, there are three female members of the club participating. Kuroneko, Sena..... last one is a female student in the same grade as me, but I haven't talked to her much and don't know her well.²¹

She's the one who drew the game illustrations that we talked about in our meeting the other day, and Makabe-kun convinced her to join us for the production of the next game and the research camp.

Technically, she doesn't seem to be a member..... Well, it's something like that.

The important thing is that, if all goes well, Kuroneko will have another geeky girlfriend. Anyway.

It was agreed that the male members of the club would help with the preparations for the festival.

“Everyone, I apologize for the trouble my grandson has caused you——”

The missus has been looking apologetic ever since earlier.

She seemed to have a casual relationship with the president, and it was somewhat amusing to see his old face being treated like a normal child.

The president said, as if to hide his embarrassment,

“Thank you, guys. Don't worry about it, girls. I told you it's a guest house run by my grandparents for fun. There are no other guests here anyway. The old hag is happy that so many young people have come”

Then the missus gave her grandson a swat on the head and turned to us with a smile.

“Yes, yes, my husband and I are overjoyed”

She smiled kindly.

“I can't offer much in the way of hospitality, but please make yourselves at home”

Yoroshiku-onegaishimasu! We all greet each other again.

“You can look forward to the food. It's fresh from the sea”

Said the president.

——Ooh, that's great.

“But it's too early for dinner, so let's drop our luggage and take a bath”

21 Wow. Seems a bit late to mention this

That's what happened.

We were shown to a Japanese-style room with tatami flooring.²²

The room was quite spacious and well cleaned, you could easily say it was a room at an inn or hotel.

In the center of the room, there was a glossy wooden table with a collection of teacups and teapots.

There are two rocking chairs on the porch. From the window, you can see the sea dyed by the setting sun.

The austere, discolored cooler looked quite old, but it seemed to work fine. The air conditioning is already working.

I took a sigh of relief from the cool breeze.

“It's a nice room”

“Yeah”

I laughed with Makabe-kun.

It's outrageous that this inn is run as a hobby.

Everyone put down their luggage, one by one. The long journey seemed to have taken its toll on the insufficiently exercised otaku, and some of them let out a pitiful wheeze.

Some of them immediately spread out their laptops, as expected of the games club.

By the way, of course, we are not sharing the same room as the female club members.

Kuroneko and the others are staying in the next room across the wall.

For some reason, I tapped on the wall.

Of course, there would be no reply, and I cracked a wry smile at my own mysterious behavior.

“This place doesn't have a bath like a normal house. It's a public bath”

The president said. I thought for a moment and asked,

“Is it close?”

“It's right back there”

22 Traditional Japanese straw floor mats

“Then, I'll go later”

Akagi reacts to my statement and approaches me.

“Hey, Kousaka, how come? Let's go in together~”

“Don't say weird things Akagi. It's just this evening, I have something I want to do.

“Kyoussuke-chan, haven't you been hard on me lately?”

Stop with this sudden onee²³ talk.

It's because your sister keeps making rotten remarks.

Thanks to this, I've become strangely cautious.

It's a vicious cycle that makes me feel even more uncomfortable when I suddenly notice myself doing it. It's too painful.

“So, what does Kousaka want to do in the evening?”

“I thought I'd go take pictures of the island first. After I take a bath, I don't want to sweat anymore”

Even evening scenes are necessary for a novel game.

I wanted to do what I could today.

Maybe—— the photos I took today will be used by Kuroneko tomorrow.

“You're certainly eager”

Akagi chuckled.

What? What's with you, you look so happy. I don't understand you.

And that's when the president interrupted me,

“If that's the case, go with Gokou”

More of this.

“Why?”

“Since the scenario writer is on hand, it's better to take pictures with their instruction”

“Is that so?”

“Yeah. Really, go for it”

23 It means big sister but is also slang for an effeminate man. Not touching this one

He laughed and pushed me away, I moved along without really understanding it.

“Oh, well, should I go too?”

Makabe-kun looked like he wanted to follow me, but Akagi kicked the small of his back.

It was a jump kick that had nothing to do with being a former soccer club member. It was a wrestling move.

“Hey! Wh- what are you doing all of a sudden— Akagi-san's onii-san? ”

“You have no right to call me brother! The way you look at Sena-chan is disgusting!”

“Eeeh! Is now the time to be getting angry about that!?”

“Shut up idiot! You're too dense for your own good! Isn't Miura-san giving you enough attention— you homosexual game protagonist?”

“Why did you narrow down the genre!”

What the heck are these guys doing.

I nodded my head and left the men's room where the stupid argument continued.

I called out in front of the next room, and the sliding door opened to reveal Kuroneko.

“What is it, senpai?”

“I'm going to take some pictures of the island, you want to come?”

“.....I wonder what to do. Just now, Sena and us were talking about going to the bath together——”

“Don't worry about it, just go”

Sena, who seems to have been listening in on our conversation, called out from inside the room.

Then, she ran up to Kuroneko and put her mouth to her ear,

“Ruri-chan, you know, this is a good opportunity——”

She whispered so I couldn't hear. It's a private conversation I can't listen to.

“.....Buh..... Wha- what are you saying.....”

Kuroneko blinked with flustered surprise. I wonder what kind of conversation they're having.....

When the private conversation was over, Sena grinned and tapped Kuroneko's shoulder meaningfully.

“Well, do your best then—”

She withdrew back into the room.

I'll just ask Kuroneko.

“What were you talking about?”

“N- nothing much”

“I see”

No problem, I didn't expect her to tell me.

Kuroneko seemed to be struggling with embarrassment, but then she looked up at me,

“.....I'll, go with you”

It seems she's coming.

“All right”

I'm going out, accompanied by Kuroneko.

“There's one place nearby we can go to take pictures”

“Where are we going?”

I took out a map from my backpack and unfolded it.

“Let's get the shrine. I'm going to take evening and night pictures with the same composition”

We confirmed the location and left.

A short walk north from the Miura-inn guest house, we saw a sign for the shrine.

It's old and dirty and almost unreadable, but it probably says "Hiten Shrine" on it. I wondered,

“What does 'Hiten' mean?”

“Let's ask president Miura later, there might be a story to it”

“Sure”

Following the arrow on the sign, we walked up the hill and the ground changed from asphalt to gravel.

It looks like a forest promenade. A wooden fence runs along the path.

“I think we can use this area as a backdrop”

“I'll take a picture”

I immediately took a picture with my digital camera. I borrowed it from my father.

“Let's hurry. It's further than I thought. We have to get there before the sun goes down”

“Are you okay, getting tired?”

“No problem”

She said so stoutly, but I made sure to keep an eye on her.

Eventually, we reached the end of the promenade—

“.....”

Seriously? Kuroneko's face turned pale.

There was a long flight of stone steps leading up. I guess the Hiten Shrine is just ahead.

“.....Shall I carry you on my back?”

“.....I- I'm okay”

“You don't look like you're okay”

“Come on let's go”

You don't have the strength, but you're so determined. I sighed heavily,

“I'm really tired. Let's just take it slow. If the sun goes down, so be it”

“It's obvious that you care”

Kuroneko's icy glare saw through my thoughts, and she suddenly smiled,

“But, thank you. I like that about you”

“.....S- sure”

It caught me off guard.

I don't know how to react.

What kind of “like” do you mean?

I had various thoughts about this.

I averted my gaze from her and looked forward,

“L- let's go”

“Y- yeah”

Hey, why is Kuroneko also trembling?

After climbing up a long flight of stone steps, we came to a wooden torii gate.²⁴

Looking back from a height, I see a large area of trees growing strong.

The shrine seems to be located in a forest clearing.

“.....Phew..... We made it in time for the evening”

Kuroneko had reached her limit, and leant against the torii gate gasping for air.

“Good work”

“You too.By the way, isn't the sun going down late? I'm sure it tooka lot of time to get up here”

Don't push yourself. Talk to me once you've caught your breath.

“Now you mention it, it's not getting dark at all”

The sky was already changing colour on the way to the inn.

It was still a sunset sky.

“It's been a while, hasn't it?”

“What time is it? I left my phone at the inn.....”

“Uh.....”

I checked my watch.

And—

“What? It's stopped..... Wow—, seriously..... I didn't do anything”

“I guess you're just mechanically challenged”

“No no, seriously I have no idea how it could have broken. I've had too many things break around me lately, like my phone the other day..... damn it”

Can't be helped if it doesn't work. Uh..... I left my phone at the inn too..... I'll just look at the built-in clock on the digital camera.

24 The ornamental painted arches you see at the entrance of shinto shrines

So I thought.

It's reset to its default state too. It doesn't seem to interfere with shooting, so I'm relieved about that.

I gestured despairingly.

“And so, I can't tell the time either”

“Oh dear.....”²⁵

Finally catching her breath, Kuroneko stepped through the torii gate and turned back to me,

“Then let's get some evening shots as soon as possible. We don't know when it will get dark”

“Right”

I grabbed my digital camera and walked towards Kuroneko.

The moment I passed through the torii gate, I felt a tingle of static electricity on the nape of my neck,

“?”

I decided it was just my imagination.

“What's is it, senpai? Maybe you got caught in a spider's web”

“No, it's nothing. I'm coming now”

I trotted over to Kuroneko who had gone ahead.

I caught up as she stopped and stood by her side.

There was nobody else around at the shrine. I was alone with Kuroneko.

In front of us was a small shrine without even a collection box. It may look old, but it's well maintained and not dirty at all. Rather, its antiquity reinforces the impression of mystery.

The grounds were solemn.

“.....”

I stood there for a moment.

This clear air could not be transmitted through photos or videos.

As the president said, it was right to bring Kuroneko.

I think I now understand the importance of experiencing things for yourself.

25 Yare yare ne.....

“Senpai, photo”

“Ah, yeah”

If Kuroneko hadn't spoken, I might have been lost in a daze forever.

I took a few shots of the shrine with the sunset sky in the background. I turned around and took some shots of the grounds.

I took a lot of pictures from various angles, so that there's no shortage of material for later.

“Which spot?”

“Take a picture of the torii gate from the grounds, and one looking up the stone steps please”

“Roger”

Kuroneko instructed me to take more photos.

Once we were done taking evening photos, we waited for the sun to set in the shade of a tree where the heat was more bearable.

Well, until the stubborn sun goes down, let's wait and chat.

“Hey, senpai. About the heroine I'm in charge of.....”

“Ah”

“.....I'll tell you about their first appearance scene, maybe you could tell me what you think”

“Of course. But are you sure you want my opinion? I'm a complete amateur, remember?”

“You know more about gal games than I do, don't you?”

“Well, yeah, I guess.....”

Mostly because of my sister.

“I'm writing a gal game scenario for the first time. I've never had any interest in them, and when Kirino has tried to talk about them, I've just looked down on her and made fun of her.....”

“.....Nostalgic”

Hopefully, I'll get to see you guys fighting over your favourite works again.

Kuroneko continued,

“If I'm going to do this, I'll write it properly. I mean, should I create a 'cute heroine' like the ones Kirino is infatuated with?”

“Yeah, I guess. I think that's a good plan”

In more ways than one.

Kirino's taste as a gal game player is quite popular, apart from her obsession with little sisters. I think it's good to have clear idea of who your target audience is.

I also know Kirino very well.

What kind of games she found interesting, what kind of heroines she went crazy over—

I know it better than anyone.

That's why.

I know what *Kirino would say* about what Kuroneko is going to write.

“Hey, when she comes back to Japan, we can let her play it”

“That's right..... Fufu..... She'll be sickeningly infatuated as usual. With the heroine that we created”

Wonderful. Let's do that.

Kuku..... Really, it's a great idea. Now this is getting fun.

“So then— what about the scene where the heroine appears?”

“Yeah..... Since this is my first time writing, I think I'll stick to basics”

“Ho, what kind of thing?”

“I'm thinking about 'falling from the sky’”

“That's really clichéd”

No just in gal games, in anime and manga too, this is one of the most common developments.

“That's okay isn't it? That girl never said an eroge heroine was bad because of a clichéd first appearance. The most important thing is whether it's a little sister. The second most important thing is whether it's erokawaii”²⁶

“You're right”

Kuroneko nodded with a wry smile.

“You've given me a lot of confidence, thank you. I already have a plan for her name, so the next thing to decide is, 'Why she falls from the sky' 'Where she falls' 'What the protagonist is doing when she falls' — that sort of thing”

“Why she falls from the sky' — Because she's an angel, or, because she's an alien, or something”

26 Ero kawaii – sexy cute – I'd assume she's quoting Kirino here

“Where does she fall' — Usually on the way to school, or through the roof of the hero's room, or in a place associated with the heroine.”

“What the protagonist is doing when she falls' — Well, I guess colliding with each other would be standard”

“It can lead to so-called lucky-fanservice”²⁷

“Well I guess it's something for men——”

——Like this, we threw together ideas for material.

We were chatting under the shade of a tree, when Kuroneko's eyes widened with a gasp.

“Senpai *up*”

She shouted in a panicked state.

“Eh?”

I looked up with a stupid voice——

“Gwhoa!”

I was crushed by something that fell on me. I was smashed in the face, hard.

It was quite a shock. I honestly don't know how I didn't pass out.

Because my eyes were closed, I couldn't see anything.

“Ow.....ch.....tsktsk.....”

There's an expression about seeing stars, and that's exactly what's happening right now.²⁸

I fell to the ground, fortunately it was onto soil, I seemed to be uninjured.

Then I suddenly thought,

——something is on top of me.

I opened my eyes. Then——

“Ooh~~ It hurts~~”

27 Lucky-sukebe, a type of fan service in anime where there's accidental nudity, groping, etc.

28 Literally “stars are flying”



A completely white girl was right in front of me.²⁹

Her neat blouse and skin as clear as fresh snow looked as if it would melt and disappear at any moment.

Such a girl was sitting on top of me, her eyes tightly closed.

Apparently this girl had 'fallen from the sky'.

Of course, I don't believe that she really 'came down from heaven' but I think the reason why I was able to accept this incomprehensible phenomenon so readily was because her appearance was so striking.

“Senpai, are you hurt?”

Kuroneko peered at me anxiously.

I nodded *I'm okay* at her, and then addressed the mysterious girl.

“Hey, you.....?”

“Huh? Ah——”

The girl responded to my voice and opened her eyes.

“Ueeeh!”

Aren't you too surprised? For a beautiful girl, that's an incredible overreaction.

I'm more surprised than you are.

“Eh? Eh? What's this? Why? What's going on?”

She hid her gaping mouth with one hand, pointed at my face with a trembling finger, and generated a massive quantity of “?” above her head.

I spoke to her calmly,

“Sorry for the confusion, but could you please get off me?”

“Wa! Wawaa!”

In a flailing panic, she finally got off of me and stood up.

Next I stood up and asked “Are you hurt?”

The girl picked up a sketchbook which must have belonged to her,

“I'm fine!”

29 The implication is that she's white all over, not that she's Caucasian

“I see”

Phew..... I'm so relieved.

“—So?”

Kuroneko, with her arms crossed, interjected between the girl and me.

“Where did you fall from?”

“.....Ooh.....”

“It's rude to look so surprised at my face”

“I- I'm sorry. Ah..... that..... such a beautiful girl~”

“Please don't make careless excuses”

Kuroneko narrowed her eyes.

I'm sure you can tell.

It was obvious that this girl was trying to hide something.

“It's not like that! Umm, where I fell from, was it. —There”

The girl pointed upwards. Our eyes followed her finger—

“From the clouds?”

“From the tree”

“.....Huh.....”

Kuroneko was disappointed.

Did you..... really imagine that— 'an angel has fallen from the sky' or something?

Well, I also thought that for a moment, so I can't really talk.

That's not possible.

The girl who was white like an angel spoke,

“I was climbing a tree, and I fell”

“At your age? Don't tell me, you were drawing pictures up there?”

Kuroneko glanced at the sketchbook and asked.

Looking for a special composition— If it was eccentricity for the sake of creativity, I would be convinced.

Incidentally, the girl looks about the same age as Kuroneko.

Third year of middle school or first year of high school. I can't tell since it depends on the individual.

Responding to Kuroneko's question, *that's not it* she gestured in denial, suddenly becoming proud and saying,

“I was trying to catch a beetle!”

“.....At your age?”

“It's great! D- don't look so surprised! I'm telling you, the bugs on this island are amazing! Beetles, stag beetles, and other rare and high-selling items still live here!”

“Huh, is that so”

To be honest, there's a lot of things to question.³⁰

But for the moment, I understand her explanation about why she was climbing the tree.

Kuroneko seemed to be losing interest in the girl.

“Right. Just be careful not to get your nice clothes dirty”

Suddenly, she turned and looked away. Maybe for Kuroneko, who likes to make her own clothes, seeing the girl climbing trees in such pretty clothes made her angry.

Perhaps sensing such a thing, the white girl called out strongly “Wait!” to Kuroneko,

“Umm, there's a deeper reason for this! I——”

However, Kuroneko snorted curtly.

“I'm not interested”

“No listen! It won't take long! Hey, hey, we've already come this far getting to know each other!”

“.....It can't be helped..... Go ahead and say it”

Strange..... *this is an unusual situation.*

This whole time Kuroneko has been talking normally with somebody she just met.

Wha- just what the heck is going on here.....

I wonder if she's matured enough to be able to have a decent relationship with others without any kind of trigger.

While I was having very discourteous thoughts about Kuroneko, the girl spoke,

30 “there's a lot of things to tsukkomi”

“I came to this island on a trip, but..... for various reasons, I lost all my money!”

What do you mean by various reasons. Aren't you leaving out the important parts?

“Therefore, I need to secure clothing, food and shelter, as soon as possible. — But, a young maiden like me can't suddenly become a day labourer right? It's already evening”

“So why are you catching bugs?”

“Selling the rare and big items, for operation earn enough for tonight's lodging!”

That's a lazy name for an operation.

As I recall, insects are allowed to be sold privately as long as they're not a protected species?

I wonder how well that would work. If there are any stores on the island that would buy them in the first place.

After listening to the story, Kuroneko now looked clearly worried,

“Who came with you? You didn't come on this trip alone, did you? Did you go to the police station?”

“Ah~I came with my family, but let's just say I can't rely on them for that~~~~~”

There must be a reason. This girl is suspicious.

Hmm, Kuroneko pondered with a troubled face. Eventually, she spoke,

“I'm Ruri Gokou. Please tell me your name”

“Eh? M- my name is— Ko- not that..... close.....”³¹

The white girl stopped herself mid sentence.

After thinking for a while, she spoke again,

“I am——..... Haruka Makishima”

“*What's that?*How is it written in kanji?”

“It's the 'maki' from 'Inumaki', 'shima' as in 'island', and 'Haruka' written like 'eternity’”³²

“.....I see”

What's with this exchange.

Kuroneko's eyes were wide and agitated.....

31 She was about to say her family name (Japanese name order is backwards)

32 This kanji in eternity is usually read as “Yu” - she specifies the reading “Haruka”

It's not just because it was obviously a fake name, is it?

There was a strong sense of unease. First of all, using a fake name is strange in itself, and then there's.....

For a spontaneous pseudonym, she answered too smoothly when asked for the kanji.

Even though it was a fake name, it didn't feel like she was lying.

Isn't that strange?

Ah..... I guess the last name was taken from the name of the island..... no, even still.

The strangest thing is that *I don't distrust her even though she's using a pseudonym*.

Kirino (erogamer) might say that, for some reason I— from the beginning, had a high favorability rating with the girl.³³

It's like she's using cheats. Or a powerful hypnosis.

Let me correct any misunderstanding you might have, it's not just because she's beautiful.

I'm used to that from my sister.

While I was agonizing over this, Kuroneko spoke in a somewhat stronger tone,

“Haruka Makishima— huh. Well if things don't work out, come to the inn where we're staying. The 'Miura-inn' near the public bathhouse. If you look out for the chimney landmark, you'll find it. —So, don't even think about camping out just because you don't have money”

“What do you take me for! Do I look like such a feral child?”

“Yes you do”

“Ueeh..... I— See..... But, thank you.Umm..... Gokou-san, should I call you?”

When asked, Kuroneko thought for a moment and smirked.

“Please call me Kuroneko”

“That's—.....”

“Handle name..... No—..... 'True name of the soul’”

Haruka must have been taken aback when she saw her new acquaintance bursting with chuunibyou.

So I thought.

“.....Roger. Kuroneko-chan”

33 “erogamer” is written as furigana on “Kirino” - implying that's how to read her name

She giggled and smiled happily. Then she turned to me,

“And you?”

“Kyouusuke Kousaka”

“Uh huh”

She smiled— it's like Kirino's face looking at a new game,

“Yoroshiku, Kyouusuke-kun”

That's what Haruka called me.

Though I didn't feel nervous like I did with Kuroneko.

Her happy smile warmed my heart.

She reminded me of my sister.

After taking pictures of the shrine at night, we parted ways with Haruka and headed back to the Miura-inn.

I made quick preparations and headed for the public bath at the back of the building, where I met Kuroneko at the door.

“Hey”

When I raised one hand in greeting, she gave a little bow and stood next to me.

Kuroneko and I were both carrying baskets with a clothes and other things in them.

Our destination was the same. We walked together implicitly.

“Senpai, still..... it feels like the flow of time has slowed since earlier”

“Ah, the president and everyone still haven't come back from the bath yet”

Honestly, I was worried that we might not make it back in time for dinner, but my fears were unfounded.

I can even afford to take a bath like this.

“It's a strange thing”

It's a misunderstanding, but we both feel that way.

Soon I could see our destination. Like the Miura-inn, it was a building that retained the atmosphere

of the Showa era.³⁴

It felt like a good old-fashioned public bathhouse with a chimney.

After passing through the curtain at the entrance, there is a shoe box where you can change your shoes into slippers and proceed.

Next to the reception desk where you pay the bathing fee, there is a lobby with CRT TV and electric fan, table tennis table, battered arcade games, and vending machines.

It's like a little rest stop.

There, the president, Makabe-kun, and the Akagi siblings were cooling off.

The other club members were playing ping-pong even though they had just finished taking a bath, or playing a nostalgic rock-paper-scissors arcade game.

They seemed to be fully enjoying the first night of camp.

Jan •ken •pon, aiko-de, sho! Aiko-de, sho!³⁵

As I listened to the angry voice and finished paying, Akagi in a yukata spotted me and called out,

“Oh, there you are Kousaka”

“Ruri-chan, over here—”

Sena was in a good mood, with fruit milk in one hand.

She had taken off her glasses, and she looked outrageously sexy in her yukata after the bath.

The look in her brother Kohei's eyes was scary, so I quickly averted my gaze from Sena.

And then my eyes met with the president. He too looked strangely good in his yukata.

He asks me with a grin, fanning his face with a fan,

“How'd it go?”

“Some good results. I think I got some good shots. I'll show you later”

“Ooh, I see! Well that's great..... what about your other goal?”

“What other goal?”

“.....ah, okay I understand”

As if he had guessed something, the president ended the conversation.

34 Showa era: 1926-1989

35 Traditional chants for Japanese rock-paper-scissors, janken is the name of the game, aiko desho is “it's a draw”

Meanwhile, Kuroneko had been caught by Sena and was being whispered to again.

“Mufufu, Ruri-chan, the baths here——.....”

“Eh.....”

“So..... I heard from the president, now.....”

“Wha- what are you saying”

“Hehe—, you know what I mean~~. I thought it would be a nice situation—”

“I don't know.Say what you want”

Kuroneko turned away in a huff, and then glanced at me.

“.....”

She stared silently for a few seconds, then walked quickly into the women's bath.

The president pushed my back with a thump.

“Go in quickly. It's almost time for dinner”

“Right”

I walked through the curtain of the men's bath and stepped into the changing room.

I washed my head and body in the bathhouse and took a shower to remove the dirt and tiredness from the trip.

Then I headed for the much-awaited open-air bath.

“Ooh..... this is very authentic”

Honestly I was surprised. From the outside of the bathhouse, it didn't look like it had an outdoor bath.

Well, there's a chimney, so I guess it's not a hot spring.

There is a separate ordinary bath, the open-air bath itself is not that big.

The bath stood alone in a garden with yew plum pines, it looked strangely cool.

I inwardly cheered with joy and entered the water.

As I soaked up to my shoulders and enjoyed the heat on my skin——

“.....Senpai.....are you there?”

“Heh!?”

Even though I was in hot water, I thought my heart would stop.

I could hear the voice of Kuroneko, who was supposed to be in the women's bath, coming from behind me, on the other side of the fence.

.....Apparently, the men's and women's outdoor baths were very close to each other.

In other words, on the other side of this thin fence..... Is Kuroneko, not wearing a single thread.

I turn my head toward the voice and gulp down a mouthful of saliva.

This..... shitty countryside! Don't they have any sense of security!

I mean, Kuroneko is Kuroneko! What if I wasn't the only one in here!

After a brief period of turmoil, I managed to regain my composure and reply.



“Y- yeah..... I'm here”

“.....R- right. There's only senpai in the men's bath right now..... Sena..... told me.....”

“Ah—— Th- that's right”

That must have been their private conversation earlier.

As I convinced myself, Kuroneko timidly spoke,

“Um..... Just a little, let's stay, like.....this..... maybe”

“I don't mind. It's like a hot spring trip, it's fun. I feel like I'm getting something out of it”

“Yeah”

I won't say it out loud.

But something like talking with my kouhai in the women's bath over the fence——

Isn't it so very youthful, I thought.

Every time I hear a small sound of water from the other side of the fence, my heart feels like it's going to explode.

As if to drown out the hazy feeling that was eroding my brain, I tried to speak calmly,

“Well, um, let's talk about something”

“Earlier—— about Haruka”

“Oh, about that. It's unusual for Kuroneko to want to talk about someone you just met”

I pictured in my mind the image of a white girl who called herself Haruka Makishima,

“Aah..... What a strange one. To be honest, she was very suspicious, but she didn't seem like a bad person”

“You're right”

“Hey, why is it?”

“.....What do you mean?”

“You were very kind to her. That's unusual”

“.....Ah.....that's.....”

It took a while for the rest to come out.

“.....The name.....was the same”

“Their name? Uh..... their name is the same as someone you know..... is that it?”

“No..... as the heroine of the novel game I'm about to write”

I couldn't respond right away. The answer was too unexpected.

“That's——”

“Of course, I haven't told anyone. 'Haruka Makishima' is a creation that only exists in my head”

“.....”

“——Isn't that strange?”

If that's true. No, seriously, what's up with that.

Kuroneko is severely afflicted by chuunibyou, but she doesn't lie like this.

She talks about having the power of darkness—— and for example, giving Sena unwanted nicknames like 'Mystic Eyes'.

A show-off or attention seeker—— I'm not saying anything like that. Though if you asked me what the difference is, I'm not sure I could answer confidently. Anyway, this is not a lie.

That means.....

“Could it be..... coincidence?”

“If you think about it normally. With a very similar idea to mine, she gave herself a pseudonym—— this is the most convincing. From 'Inumaki Island'—— 'Makishima'. 'Haruka' is—— well, it's common name, and not hard to find..... but”³⁶

“In the end, I'm not convinced”

“.....That's right. A girl with the same name as my heroine, of all people, 'fell from the sky'. Same as the appearance scene I was thinking of—— in that place, I took a curt attitude but..... to be honest, I couldn't help being curious”

“Well, yeah”

Now that I've heard her side of the story, all I can say is that she's probably right.

“I'm starting to think like something really mysterious is going on”

Even if it's not chuunibyou.

“Yeah.....and.....”

“And?”

“When I saw that she was in trouble..... I knew I couldn't leave her alone. I don't know how to

36 “shima” = “island”

describe it. That..... because there was..... a resemblance, maybe”

“Resemblance? That's—”

I thought of Kirino's face. But what Kuroneko said was a different name.

“.....Hinata..... She looked a bit like my little sister”

“Huh.....”

Hinata-chan. The one I talked to a bit on the phone the other day— that girl.

“Their faces aren't that similar, their ages are quite different.Not so much the appearance, but her personality..... or rather, the impression I got.....”

Now you mention it, there was a vivacious element that they shared.

“She— looked like Kirino, I thought”

“Ah..... she was a beautiful girl. As beautiful as Kirino”

“No, that's an overstatement. But, if you ask me, their faces looked a little similar.....maybe?”

“.....What kind of person are you, honestly..... saying that so naturally”

“Eh?”

“.....No, it's nothing. So?”

“That's why I felt that Haruka 's inner self was like Kirino. Her personality is completely different, I don't know..... I can't really explain it”

“I understand. Ah..... that's why she was easy to talk to. That makes a bit more sense”

I don't want to admit it. Seriously, but since I'm alone with Kuroneko, I'll just admit it for a moment.

Me, and Kuroneko too, with Kirino gone.....

Maybe we're lonely.

A stranger girl. The first time meeting her, we're seeing images of Kirino.

That bastard, I wonder what she's up to now.

As it was, the two of us were talking for a while. I suddenly realized that we were soon talking about Kirino.

.....It can't be helped. It's a mutual— and never-ending topic of conversation.

Eventually.....

“It's time to get out. I'm starting to feel dizzy”

“Haha, what happened to your film of spiritual energy defence?”

“Ffu..... The effect diminishes in the sacred realm”

“Hey hey, then, I guess I'll get out too”

“.....See you in the lobby”

We parted ways from the hot water.

Men are much faster at this and that after bathing. When I got to the lobby, I couldn't see Kuroneko.

I bought some fruit milk from the vending machine and decided to wait and cool down.

Just as I finished my drink.....

“.....Sorry to keep you waiting”

Kuroneko appeared in a yukata through the curtain of the women's bath.

“O- Ooh”

A voice mixed with reply and astonishment came out.

I wonder why women are so sexy after taking a bath.

The steam rising from her hot skin felt like a mesmerizing aura.

“Is fruit milk okay?”

“Yes, thank you”

I pretended to be calm handing over the drink, and we cooled off side by side.

“.....Will we be late for the meal?”

“It's still okay. Look”

With a relaxed posture, I pointed to the clock on the wall.

“We have a bit, let's take our time”

Since arriving on this island—

The flow of time felt strangely slow.

It's a curious phenomenon, and a bit eerie I thought.

“It can't be helped..... In that case, how about a light game of air hockey?”

“Oh, are you sure? You know I'm good at this?”

“Ara..... fufufu..... Are you going to beat me at a game?”

“All right, it's a match! Bring it on!”

I changed my mind.

You can slow it down as much as you like, just for now.

And so.

The first day of the Games Research Club camp is finally over.

Like a young child during summer vacation in elementary school, it was a long and relaxing day.

In the extraordinary setting of this island, there are six days left.

In my futon, I close my eyes peacefully.....

Chapter 3

—.....-san. It's morning, wake up.

In a dreamy state, I heard a girl's voice.

Maybe because it was faint, it sounded like my sister, or my kouhai, or ██████'s voice.³⁷

The mysterious tone changed its contours little by little ———

“Kyouzuke-kun! It's morning~~~~~! Please get up————! ”

It led me to awakening.

“Wow!”

It shouted in my ear, I couldn't help but open my eyes. My body jumped with a start.

“All right~~~~~! You're up——! Breakfast is ready!”

“Y- you.....”

I thought I was still half asleep. Because there was a surprising smile there.

“Heheh— Good morning! Kyouzuke-kun♪”

Haruka Makishima. The girl we met at the shrine.

Unlike yesterday, she was wearing a T-shirt and had a cheerful charm appropriate for early morning.

“Are you surprised!? Heheh— I decided to stay here too. Kuroneko-chan told me, remember?”

“A- aha..... I see..... so then.....”

“Oops, before you get the wrong idea, I paid for the accommodation!”

No way. Surely she just gave up and went crying to Kuroneko.

“So that..... beetle..... was it? Did you catch it?”

“The rare one I wanted! Heheh— it's amazing!”

“That is amazing..... You sure are formidable”

She caught it, successfully sold it..... and checked into the inn..... all since that time?

If I hadn't just woken up, I might have wondered a little more about this story.

“No no, the circumstances were just good! I was saved by the girl at the pet shop and the lady at the inn, they were very understanding! But still, I have to earn my keep!”

Yesterday she was quite vague, I don't really understand her circumstances.

Haruka was penniless on her trip and seemed to be in real trouble.

37 A character is scribbled out here

And yet after we parted at the shrine, while I was taking a bath and sleeping, she had recovered so much from her situation.

I dare say for someone younger than me, she has a considerable life force.

She's full of energy.

“That's why, for various reasons I'm staying in the same room as Kuroneko-chan. — Just for a short time, once again I'd like to say, *yoroshiku*”

She closed one eye in a playful gesture.

There's been a lot of “various reasons” since yesterday.

“If it's okay with Kuroneko and the others, I have no complaints. Likewise, *yoroshiku*”

“Yeah! So, please come to the dining room after you change your clothes. —You happy thing♪”

“? Sure.....”

Leaving behind a mysterious line, Haruka left the men's room.

Well— I'm completely awake now. I'm not someone who wakes up easily.

At least it's a little better than being awoken by a slap in the middle of the night.

When I got out of the futon, the boys who seemed to have overheard our exchange gathered and vigorously questioned me, “Who's the girl now?” “Cheating is no good Kousaka”

In what way am I cheating.

I'm not dating any one, and Haruka is not a romantic interest at all, it's not like that.

That's roughly how I explained it.

I changed my clothes, washed my face, and headed for the dining room with the president and everyone.

It's another tatami-matted room with a wooden table that could accommodate all the club members.

I saw it it briefly yesterday, it's adjacent to a proper kitchen.

Although it's a Showa-style inn, only the cooking utensils are new.

Apparently it's a hobby of the husband— the president's grandfather.

He told me about it at dinner last night.

Open shop near the sea, cook delicious freshly caught fish and serve it to guests—.

The old man, who was built like a pro-wrestler, laughed heartily as he told me about his hobby.

When I entered the dining room filled with these thoughts,

“Hey, morning”

“Morning, senpai”

“Good morning! Kousaka-senpai!”

The boys were welcomed by the girls in kappogi.

They promptly started serving up Japanese food.

Nikujaga³⁸, grilled fish, boiled pumpkin, spinach sardines..... and more, it's a lavish menu for the morning.

“What's with you guys, looks like you've been practicing your home economics—”

The president seemed intrigued, Sena answered,

“We helped make breakfast! Honestly, I thought it might be too presumptuous since the husband is a professional chef, but we had to ask anyway. Because— look, you understand?”

Sena winked with a twinkle.

Yeah. I understand.

Kuroneko scurried back into the kitchen with a fleeing gait.

Sena grinned as she watched her.

“Hah, I see”

The president said with a wry smile. He turned to me,

“Hey Kousaka! Isn't this great! Today's breakfast is handmade by the female members!”

“Looks that way. Which dishes did Kurone— Gokou make?”

“I'm glad you asked Kousaka-senpai! This— grilled fish, boiled pumpkin, and nikujaga! Please go ahead and try them!”

“Eh, that's almost everything that's out here. Seriously? Surely this was a professional job.....”

And that wasn't just flattery.

Sena clapped her hands,

“I know right! Ruri-chan is a surprisingly good cook! We hardly came into play!”

“.....'Surprisingly' isn't necessary Sena. What do I look like to you guys?”

38 A Japanese meat and potato stew

Kuroneko had brought in a pot which she held with mittens.

Hey hey..... Isn't this a lot of food for the morning? Is this a banquet?

“Because, doesn't it seem like the usual Ruri-chan would insist on 'cooking' something crafted in a magical ritual? She'd take out a healing item from the alchemy cauldron and say 'Kukuku..... it is done”

With all due respect, I agree. Like Kuroneko's atelier or something.

The ominous catchphrases create a dark-fantasy vibe.

“Which ones did Sena-chan make?”

Akagi asked with excitement. Sena smiled,

“I assisted Ruri-chan, and helped with the serving”

“I see, that's great”

This guy..... is too soft on his sister.

Watching our exchange,

“.....Fufuu..... good stuff”

Haruka looked on, smiling.

She was already sat alone at the table, ready for battle in a prime position in front of the pot.

It looks like she's ready to eat a lot. Which is reasonable for her, considering she's probably almost broke.

Eventually everyone gathered—

““““Itadakimasu!””””

Breakfast has begun. The first thing I did was stretch out my chopsticks to take a bite of the stew that was handmade by Kuroneko.

“So good!”

“Really, well, I'm glad”

Kuroneko relievedly stroked her chest.

“No, it's seriously good. If I eat this, I'll never be able to eat at home”

I can tell just be eating a little. In terms of cooking skill, my mother doesn't even reach the feet of Kuroneko.

Seeing me eat vast quantities, she spoke bashfully,

“You're exaggerating.I think it turned out delicious because the ingredients were good”

“I'm not exaggerating. You're a great chef”

“.....Be quiet and eat”

She lowered her head in embarrassment. As usual, she's weak to praise.

The other members were also praising the food, so she was embarrassed the whole time.

A great chef and homemaker.

I didn't know. Kuroneko— Ruri Gokou had such a side.

From that morning, I could see her in a new light.

“Ooh..... delicious..... it's delicious.....uguu, I'm gonna cry.....!”

No less than me, Haruka was also enthusiastically gulping down her meal.

Perhaps she was hungry because she hadn't eaten in a while.

Eat as much as you want, I thought kindly.

She doesn't— stop.....Despite her neat appearance, she's a wild one.

The male members watched in amazement.

“B- by the way—”

Makabe-kun pulled his gaze away from Haruka and changed the subject.

“Let's review the research camp schedule, just in case”

With agreement from all, he spoke calmly,

“Firstly our current situation, and the purpose of this camp. Our new project, 'Gal Game Set On A Summer Island (working title)' - the game system is almost complete, as we'll be using something we made before. Adjustments and finishing touches will be led by Akagi-san. Background music will mostly be free material..... Inoue-senpai, who is in charge of illustrations, has temporarily returned, so we'll leave that to her. At the end of summer break, based on the photos taken on location, she will deliver the background illustrations”

Leave it to me - Inoue, the girl in charge of illustrations, raised one hand.

She says she'll work on the character designs after the scenario is finished.

“As for the scenario, already the plot..... a simple blueprint for the story— has been completed. It's already approved by everyone, so all you have to do is write”

“Reflecting on the data collected during camp..... The end of summer break is the deadline for the scenario”

Said the president.

Okay – Makabe-kun and Kuroneko nodded.

“I will be in charge of the shared parts and main heroine's scenario, Gokou-san will be in charge of the other three character's scenarios. Now that we've reviewed everything, the main subject from here is— there are two things I want to do during the camp”

He raised one finger.

“Shooting background materials that could be used in the game”

And another finger,

“Investigate and collect material on 'island folklore' to reinforce the setting of the work”

“Island folklore'?”

When I asked about this topic that didn't come up yesterday, instead of Makabe-kun, the president replied,

“Both Makabe and Gokou wanted to add mystery elements to the gal game. In order to make it realistic, they want to research actual occult stories and folklore. And so, I told them that on this island we came to for camp, there are various things like that”

Kuroneko: “You said there was a 'Tennyo legend’”³⁹

“Yeah, it's not the same as the 'Tale of Hagoromo' you often hear.⁴⁰ It would be fun to use it for the backbone of a gal game heroine. It's a bit corny”

Ah..... That's why Kuroneko was trying to make the heroine's appearance scene “fall from the sky”. If you're going to give the work a setting with a “Tennyo legend” motif, then it's very appropriate.

“As I wrote in the plot, this scenario is about an occult research group going to camp on an island. I'll write the rest of the story based on my experience at this camp. Each scenario will add an alternate interpretation of the 'Tennyo legend' — That's the current assumption, but, well, we'll see how that goes..... I guess”

“We'll need to have a meeting in the second half of the camp to go cover the material”

Said Kuroneko.

“So if you're gathering material for the camp, you need to enjoy yourselves properly!”

Sena insisted cheerfully.

“Since this is a good opportunity, let's swim in the sea! That would be great for the story!”

39 Tennyō – literally “heaven(ly) woman” - female angels from Japanese Buddhism

40 Hagoromo – literally “The Feather Mantle” - a traditional Japanese Noh dance-drama play about a Tennyō

It was half an excuse to have fun, but nobody said no.

That's right. Everyone wants to have fun, even me. I want to see the girls in swimsuits.

“That's it, play hard and research hard. Let's get a good balance”

The president spoke to summarise, and correct the trajectory of the conversation,

“So then—— at this camp, we're going to research the 'island folklore', play hard, and make fun memories! Got that!”

Yeeah! The members got exited.

“All right, so today's plan! We'll be divided into groups to research the island folklore and help prepare for the festival, and each do our respective jobs. The division is——”

The president announced the groupings.

Me and Kuroneko are in a group researching island folklore. If we find a good location, I'll take photographs.

By the way, “everyone goes to play in the sea” will be done tomorrow or later.

“I don't know much about the folklore, so ask baa-chan. And then there's—— that's right. If I remember right, there's a local museum”

“Let's go, senpai”

“Sure!”

Haha, it's kinda like a romance novel development.

My spirit of adventure is stimulated.

Actually, it would be a simple job, but I'm just exited to be doing it with Kuroneko.

And so—— “Today's schedule” for the games club was finalized.

“Kyoussuke-kun, Kuroneko-chan”

Haruka, who had emptied her bowl, called us with a serious face.

“What is it? You want more?”

“Yes! No, I'm ——not hungry now! Of course I'll have another helping, but that's not it! —— You're researching the island folklore right? In that case, can I join you this afternoon? I have a part time job in the morning, so it will be after that”

“? May I ask why?”

“For some reason, I'm also researching the island folklore. —— Let's exchange information”

After breakfast.

In the garden of the Miura-inn, I was with Kuroneko hanging the laundry.

“Thank you so much. I'm sorry to let my guests do this”

“No, it's no big deal.....”

While speaking humbly to the missus, Kuroneko dexterously hung the clothes.

She was working vigorously, her pure white skin glowing in the morning sun.

I wondered how she could be so motherly despite being so young, younger than me.

Speaking of which, Kuroneko's little sister Hinata-chan had said that “onee-chan does a lot around the home”. Maybe Kuroneko is accustomed to the work of a housewife.

Now.

The reason why we are in this situation is simple, we decided to follow the president's suggestion and get a story from the missus. When we found her, she seemed to be doing the laundry, so now we're helping her.

I carried the laundry basket over to Kuroneko and spoke to the missus.

“Actually, there's something we'd like you to tell us——”

“Of course, if it's something I know, no problem”

The missus kindly agreed, so I asked her about the island folklore.

Then she said in a light tone.

“Ah, you mean about 'Hiten-sama”

“That 'Hiten' you say”

I wondered if it was the same name that was engraved on the signboard yesterday.

She wrote in the air with her finger,

“It's 'Hi' written as 'to fly' and 'ten' from 'The sun’”⁴¹

“Hahaa, 'Hiten”

Hiten.

41 She refers to the sun as “otento-sama”

It's a familiar character from a sword fighting manga——⁴²

“That's what they call the Tennyo”

Kuroneko told me.

“There are many theories about their origin—— in Japan, they are often depicted as 'a woman who flies without wings, clothed in feathers”

“Huh”

As expected, you know a lot about these things.

The missus smiled and nodded as if to say *good answer*.

“On this island, long ago..... there is a legend that a beautiful 'Hiten-sama' clad in a black feathered robe descended from the mountain, and gave wisdom to the people. Even now, in the summer, we hold a festival at the 'Inumaki Shrine' to thank Hiten-sama”

This must be the festival that Akagi and the others are helping with now.

It's apparently called the 'Hiten Festival'

“Maybe the shrine we went to yesterday”

“It seems it was dedicated to the Tennyo”

Kuroneko took over my words. She seemed to notice,

“Ah, no, wait a minute. Yesterday, the name of the shrine we went to was supposed to be 'Hiten Shrine'—— does that mean there are two shrines?”

At Kuroneko's question, the missus looked puzzled.

The only shrine on the island is the “Inumaki Shrine” and she had never heard of the “Hiten Shrine”. Kuroneko and I looked at each other for a while, but couldn't come to a conclusion.

If I remember rightly, I'm sure the shrine we went to was the “Hiten Shrine”.....

Is there only “Inumaki Shrine” on this island?

.....Well, what could it mean.

Hmm..... Unless we or the missus are misunderstanding something.

Maybe the signboard was wrong.

In the end, we decided to hold off for now, and Kuroneko asked another question.

⁴² Presumably an InuYasha reference

“What about..... the 'wisdom' that was received from 'Hiten-sama'?”

“When there was a shortage of water on the island, she persuaded the villagers to save the human sacrifice, and build many reservoirs to store water”

“Persuaded? The girl from heaven..... didn't just make it rain with supernatural powers or something?”

“From what I've heard of the old stories, she didn't have that kind of power”

“..... that's rather plain for a divine messenger”

Ah, she said it.

The missus laughed,

“I'm sure in reality, it wasn't a divine messenger. However, a very wise person from somewhere”

“The people of the island worshipped her as a Tennyo”

The missus nodded.

“According to her, the reason it doesn't rain on this island is because there are so many mountains around it that the rain clouds can't reach it. It doesn't matter how much you worship, polluting the reservoirs and human sacrifices are useless. We should prepare ourselves, not rely on the gods or Buddha. She spurned the island chief, and generally said things like that”

“.....That's certainly not the words and actions of a divine messenger”

To spurn and command, Hiten-sama is a very ferocious Tennyo.

I have a suspicion that the persuasion may have been physical.

I'm starting to get an image of Kirino in a feathered robe.

“Assuming there is a true story this legend was modelled on..... The 'Tennyo' is just a metaphor..... At that time, the island was visited by..... something else..... an armed group——maybe. No, it's too soon to make unromantic assumptions. Let's do a bit more research”

“Yeah, that's right”

Kuroneko——

“There are some Tennyo legends that are passed down in a similar way to death-gods or succubus” she said.

“Descending from the mountain” She repeated the phrase curiously.

“I wonder if she's an alien” She murmured.

It looks like she's enjoying herself. That's probably how she thinks about and creates a story.

I guess she really likes mysterious things.

To make a gal game that's suited for everyone. Maybe that's not what Kuroneko likes to do.

But if you mix in things you like in this way, it might be a fun production.

I can only hope so.

“.....'Hiten-sama', after that..... did she live here permanently?”

Kuroneko asked.

“It is said that she returned to heaven from the mountain”

“.....'Returned' to 'heaven'Fu..... As expected, my hypothesis is looking more and more like the truth”

Somehow..... Kuroneko's brain seemed to be leaning towards the "Hiten-sama" = alien theory.

After we finished drying the laundry, we thanked the missus and left the Miura-inn.

Our destination was the local museum which the president told us about.

However, we didn't head straight there, but rather looked around the town while sightseeing.

Kuroneko had changed into her usual gothic lolita fashion. As expected for a week-long trip, there was no way she could wear the same clothes every day. The familiar sight is the ordinary within this extraordinary trip.

“Yesterday's dress was great but, after all, this is what Kuroneko is supposed to look like”

“.....Fuu..... You're right”

After changing into her familiar clothes, Kuroneko seemed to be back to her usual energy.

Though I can't speak for others, yesterday, she seemed to be somewhat nervous.

We spread out the map in the shade and peered at it together.

The places I want to photograph—

“Shopping district, harbor, beach, lighthouse, museum and town hall..... maybe these places”

“Town hall?”

“I heard there's a library inside. It could be used in a scene where the hero is researching newspaper articles. It would be difficult to take pictures, but I'd like to see inside”

“Okay. But we can't go around all of them at once, that will have to wait until tomorrow”

“No objection. Let's aim for the local museum”

“Sure. On the way, you can take pictures of the streets that look good”

And so..... under the cloudless blue sky, we walked together.

All I could hear was the sound of cicadas. There were no cars on the road at all.

Only an adorable stray cat would sometimes pass by.

Since there are no humans, all the islanders have disappeared, and we're the only ones left in the world— such delusions pass through my mind.

At the extraordinary camp on this island, maybe I'm gradually becoming influenced by Kuroneko.

Although, I don't mind that.

Eventually we arrived at our destination.

The local museum is like those made by renovating a private house, not the kind of building you expect from a “museum”. There was a signboard beside the open entrance door that looked like a karate dojo.

When we stepped in, there was a space that looked like a reception area, but no one was there.

“.....Is it okay to enter without permission?”

“There's no information about admission fees, so probably. If not, we can just pay after being caught”

Kuroneko is in high spirits today.

Apparently, she seemed to liked the “Tennyo legend” that the missus told us about.

Her creative urge is welling up— you could say.

“Well, let's go”

Inside the museum, whether they were trying to make it look old, or if it was really run down, I couldn't tell, the whole place was dimly lit.

According to the pamphlet at the reception desk, the main items on display were ritual implements used in the “Hiten Festival”, but I couldn't find them near the entrance. Maybe they're further in.

We followed the arrows on the signboards to tour the museum.

There are glass cases along the wall, and hoes, sickles, and threshers are placed with explanatory text. It seemed to be an agricultural exhibition. There was nothing particularly interesting.

As we proceeded further, since the island is surrounded by the sea, there were exhibits related to fishing. There were models of ships, nets and so on.

This is not the goal either.

“I think the pamphlet said it was around here”

In the next room, there was a display of ancient earthenware, stone tools, and books, probably related to the Hiten Festival. The old portable shrine displayed in the center was probably the one actually used in the festival.....

“Senpai, here”

“Oh”

A description of the “Tenny legend” was written on a plaque on the wall.

I took a quick look at it, and although it overlaps a lot with what we heard earlier, it contains more detailed information.

The document that was the source of the legend had already been lost, and another book compiled about 700 years ago contained "Inumaki Island's Tenny legend" as a quote— something like that.

There were many bothersome little details that I would probably forget quickly, but Kuroneko seemed to be interested. I could tell by her expression.

“Fufu, a new phrase has appeared— 'Taken by spirits'”⁴³

“Eh? Is that what it says?”

“Yeah, here, look”

This kind of thing is written in such minute detail, my eyes start to slip.

I squinted and followed the letters to find the text.

Let's pick it out.

—After “Hiten-sama” returned to heaven, many people went missing in the mountains.

—The islanders feared they were being “taken by spirits”, so they built a shrine dedicated to “Hiten-sama”.

—After that, often people would go into the mountains, thinking there was a route to the kingdom of heaven.

—Many of them came back without finding anything, but some never returned.

—The islanders wrote a nursery rhyme to warn children not to go into the mountains (lyrics to follow).

—After the war, in the same place as the long-lost shrine, a new shrine was built.

43 Kamikakushi is an expression referring to the mysterious disappearance or death of a person, after they had angered the gods, or being abducted to the spirit world. Translated to “Spirited Away” in the Ghibli film title.

—From around this time, we began to hold festivals in gratitude to “Hiten-sama”.

—This was the beginning of Inumaki Shrine and the Hiten Festival.

In summary, it's like that.

Of course, this kind of legend is often based on facts, but—

“Hey..... Senpai..... I wonder if people still get 'taken by spirits”

“.....”

I couldn't answer immediately, I fell silent.

A feeling seemed to be rising in us both, in what should have been an amusing scene.

A shudder, I felt a chill. In the same way as when I passed under the torii gate.

—Isn't the sun going down late

—It's not getting dark at all

Maybe..... I'm overthinking things but.....

That dusk seemed to be infinite—

“Seems we had the same association”

When I returned from a sea of thoughts, I found Kuroneko peering at me,

“That twilight, in a place that cannot exist in this world, we were almost 'taken by spirits'..... perhaps”

“You're imagining things”

“Maybe so. Maybe not..... fufu”

“You seem happy”

“Yeah..... If I had a supernatural experience. It's something I've imagined many times”

And now it may have become a reality.

It gets your heart beating.

“However, it's a bit complicated— supernatural experiences are not possible for me. It's fun because you think that way subconsciously”

“What do you mean?”

“If I was 'taken by spirits', I wouldn't be able to return home”

Kuroneko said clearly. I don't need to ask why.

Even for one week, she didn't want to leave.

“But, even so, there is also a desire to experience the mystery with my own skin”

“Haha, it really is complicated”

“That's right. It's a real problem for me”

“Well, maybe there is such a thing as 'taken by spirits'. Let's examine it carefully”

“Yeah, let's do that”

I don't want to assume it doesn't exist. It's not that I believe it does exist.

Let's say I walk by the mystery halfway, in moderation.

After leaving the local museum, we headed for the Hiten Shrine. Because the story we heard from the missus this morning was stuck in our heads.

—There is no place named "Hiten Shrine" on this island.

The only thing we found in the museum was about the origin of "Inumaki Shrine".

But, we actually went to the "Hiten Shrine" and met Haruka.....

Or maybe we were mistaken and yesterday's shrine was not Hiten Shrine, but Inumaki Shrine? That would make sense.

It fits..... but I had an unconvinced feeling.

“Wasn't there a bend around here?”

Kuroneko said walking next to me. I stopped to look around.

“Wh..... yeah..... there was, I think. It's hard to tell since we walked from the opposite side yesterday evening. I don't remember it looking like this”

“Certainly, the impression is different. But as far as I can tell, this is the right place?”

“Hmm..... wait a minute”

Just like yesterday evening, we unfolded the map and looked at it together.

In doing so, we checked it carefully but..... there was only one shrine marked on the island.

However, the current position is on the north side of the Mirua-inn— in other words, Kuroneko is correct.

We are now walking from north to south, the opposite of yesterday.

“Let's take a look from over here”

We turned our bodies 180 degrees to look at the townscape from the same angle as yesterday evening.

When I compare the two views in my memory——

“Ah, isn't that the corner? Look, when we came yesterday, there was a soba shop there right?”

“Yeah, right”

Kuroneko approached the corner with a careful gait.....

A few words.

“.....There's no signboard”

“Eh? Ah—— you're right. Did it get put away?”

Yesterday, on this corner, “Hiten shrine” was written on a worn-out sign.

Firmly stuck in the dirt, it should have been standing there.

It was gone. There was no evidence of it being stuck there.

“.....”

“.....”

We stood rigid and silent for a short time,

“Let's keep moving”

“.....That's all we can do”

With heavy steps, we began to move.

The rest of the way was exactly the same as yesterday evening.

We walked up the hill and along the gravel path to the long stone staircase.

On the way, I used the opportunity to take some pictures from the same angle as yesterday.

The daytime scenery would also be necessary as material.

——Ah, I just thought of something.

Just before the idea took shape in my mind,

“Senpai, let's go up the stone steps to the shrine”

Kuroneko called out and my inspiration was temporarily scattered.

“Shall I just go myself? Aren't your legs sore?”

“.....I..... never said that”

“I can tell without you saying it”

Even some of the male members who are lacking in exercise were whining about muscle soreness this morning— I thought Kuroneko would surely be the same.

“.....I'll go too. If it's not a coincidence or a misunderstanding..... beyond this point, I feel there is the answer to a mysterious phenomenon”

“So you say. Your legs are shaking, are you really okay?”

“You're ruining the serious atmosphere, senpai”

She glared sideways at me.

Kuroneko spoke brazenly with a straight face.

“If you ask me if I'm okay, I'm not okay. My legs are like sticks”

“See”

“But, I have to go. I can't help but be curious, besides.....”

“Besides?”

“Please understand”

She blushed and turned away.

Hahaa..... Maybe she's afraid to be left alone.

This Kuroneko, even though she loves the occult, she has a timid side.

“Then, we'll go slowly”

Having a similar exchange as yesterday, we walked up the stone steps.

It felt harder than yesterday, probably because of the sunlight pouring down from above.

The heat reminded me of summer Comiket.

Me: “Well, it's already noon.....”

Kuroneko: “.....It feels like time is passing faster than yesterday”

Me: “If anything..... yesterday it was..... too slow though”

Out of breath, we climbed up. Eventually, we reached the top of the stone steps.

“.....”

“.....”

In a stronger sense than before, I was speechless.

It wasn't just the signboard that was gone.

Beyond the stone steps, *there was no “Hiten Shrine”*.

“.....Seriously?”

What we saw yesterday evening, the modest torii gate, the narrow grounds, the small shrine, nothing.

Only the tree that Haruka fell from matches my memory of that twilight.

Instead, there was the “Inumaki shrine”

The name of the shrine was engraved on a magnificent, brightly painted torii gate.

The male club members seemed to be decorating the spacious grounds with paper lanterns.

Akagi spotted and approached us, wiping his face with a towel,

“Oh, Kousaka, Gokou-san, what's up?”

He called out but—

Neither I, nor Kuroneko, could make a proper reply.

I couldn't understand what had happened.

And so,

“Ah, that's right, the photos—”

The lost inspiration returned and I hurriedly checked my digital camera.

If I look at the photos of “Hiten Shrine” I took yesterday evening—

“.....They're gone”

Everything was inexplicable. The only thing that was clear was,

.....apparently, all the photos of the shrine will have to be taken again.

After finally recovering from the intense turmoil, we left the Inumaki Shrine and arrived at the shopping district.

Having finished our to-do list for the morning, we were physically and mentally exhausted, the idea was to go into a store somewhere and rest.

But.....

In a word, it's deserted. There are only a few stores that are open.

I see the words "Inumaki Ginza" on an archway, I wonder if that's the official name of the shopping district.⁴⁴

It's too much of a stretch.

They should apologize to Tokyo,

“There's really no convenience store on this island”

“In rural areas it would be like this. It's good research”

“Man, this is hopeless. No way there's no fast food or cafés.....”

How do the young people of this island survive?

As I was having rude thoughts, Kuroneko tapped me lightly on the arm and pointed ahead.

“Senpai, while you're saying that, there—— a coffee shop”

Not a familiar chain store, it seemed to be a privately owned coffee shop.

A stylish store that looked out of place on the deserted shopping street. Large windows in the brick wall allow you to see inside. The furnishings and lighting were elaborate, dimly lit, and create a mysterious atmosphere.

Like a magic shop in a fantasy world, Kuroneko would like it.

“Looks like a nice place. Let's go in”

“Yeah”

Kuroneko agreed. Opening the door, a bell chirped.

We were welcomed by a woman who seemed to be the owner.

Guided to our seats, I sat face-to-face with Kuroneko. Since we would be eating lunch at the Miura-inn, we only ordered drinks. The air conditioning was working well, and I could feel the sweat receding from my body.

“Phew..... finally comfortable”

⁴⁴ Ginza is a famous upmarket shopping district in Tokyo

I gulped down some ice water and then fanned my face with my hand.

Freed from the heat, Kuroneko looked at me in a good mood and smirked,

“With so few stores, it's hard to take a break”

“You're right”

Even if you wanted to take a rest somewhere cool, there was no such place.

It's like exploring a dungeon with no recovery points.

—Hey, my metaphors are becoming more like Kuroneko's.

Now that we're in an air-conditioned store and calmed down, let's organize a few things.

Like the fact that “Hiten Shrine” has become “Inumaki Shrine”.

As I discussed with Kuroneko, we must have taken the same path as yesterday and ended up at the same shrine. However, we arrived at the “Inumaki Shrine” instead of the “Hiten Shrine”.

The photographs that prove the existence of “Hiten Shrine” had disappeared before I knew it.

I wondered if this mysterious event we experienced was really a supernatural phenomenon.

Honestly speaking, I don't really care.

The important thing is—

“Senpai, will you listen to what I think”

That she's having fun with it.

After a while of chatting with Kuroneko (mostly about the strange phenomena we were encountering), the iced coffee came.

The conversation was interrupted for a moment to drink—

“.....”

“.....”

A meaningful silence lay between us.

I'm sure Kuroneko was silent for the same reason as me.

.....Only now I started to notice.

Just the two of us walking around town and taking a break in a coffee shop.

This sort of thing.....!

Wow, it's totally a date!?

Moreover, it's not just a date.

Far from home, on an island surrounded by the sea.

We slept under the same roof and ate rice from the same pot at breakfast.

We spent the whole morning together, sightseeing in an unfamiliar place.

That's basically a “couple's holiday” isn't it!

Normally! That's only for lovers in a very intimate relationship! Is this really allowed!?

And yet last night, even though we haven't even started dating yet, we sat back to back in the outdoor bath, chatting as we went, and she showed me how she looks in a yuagari.....⁴⁵

Aaaaa.....

The haze from last night, which had been reset after a night's sleep, came back.

Ah, shit.

It's not my usual daily life, because it's so abnormal, it's like I'm out of tune.

Perhaps I was now experiencing the reason why couples tend to form during school trips.

“.....”

In a daze, I was staring at her face.

Before I knew it, the coffee was just ice.

When I sipped the straw and nothing came out, I finally noticed it.

“.....Ah, um”

She broke the silence and spoke to me.

Her flustered tone might have been because she was thinking something similar to this.

“Y- yeah..... what's up?”

“That..... please look”

Hmm? At what?

I follow Kuroneko's gaze.

Then, at the far end of the room, I spotted a strange figure.

45 Yuagari literally “after a bath” but can also mean the yukata worn afterwards, probably what he's referring to

They were wearing a pitch-black robe. The hood was low over their eyes, so you couldn't see their face.

On the table was a softball-sized crystal ball and tarot cards.

Next to that, there was a note that said, “Fortune Telling 100 Yen”.

“That, a fortune teller”

“Looks like it”

I guess they were reading the female customer sitting opposite them.

He - or she - held their hands over the crystal ball and seemed to be having a conversation.

“Huh..... well, if it's a tourist destination, it must be the resident fortune teller”

I wonder if that person is like that. No, but, this island is not a tourist destination.

Although the mysterious atmosphere of the store makes it seem less strange, it's still a strange sight.

I didn't think more deeply than that but,

“Senpai, please look closer..... those clothes.....”

Kuroneko instructed me to pay more attention.

“I think that robe is——”

She wondered.

She was about to continue, but her mouth stopped.

It felt like deja vu.

That.....? I've seen it somewhere before.....? When and where was it.....

Recently..... it was, since this camp began————

—— Look closely senpai, at the figure of this magical artifact I crafted by hand

“It's the 「necromancer robe」 !”

As soon as I realized, I spoke the answer out loud.

That's it.

It's not just another similar outfit. To meet another person wearing such crazy clothes, it couldn't be a coincidence. Even if it was an off-the-shelf product.

Just as I thought..... It was definitely the black coat that Kuroneko was bragging about to me on

the Shinkansen.

“I thought so, you see it?”

“Yeah..... but, what does this mean? Your, um, risky clothes.....”

“.....My magical artifact..... I lent it to a certain person”

“Eeh?”

Despite my bewildered voice, Kuroneko stood up silently and quickly walked over.

Towards the “mysterious person”.

“H- hey.....”

I also hurried after her.

The fortune-telling was over, and the female customer left the "mysterious person".

In her place, Kuroneko stood right beside the fortune teller and let out a long sigh.

“What a coincidence” a voice emerged.

I looked into Kuroneko's face and then at the person in question.

The suspicious fortune teller then quickly removed their hood to reveal a beautiful true face.



Waving her hand in the air,

“Yahoo— Kuroneko-chan, Kyouusuke-kun♪”

“Haruka!”

I called out her name.

“You— What are you doing here?”

I asked with my mouth wide open.

“Eeh? Can't you see~? It's a part-time job”

“No, any way I look at it. I'm full of questions. Firstly, what you mean by part-time job”

“I'm doing chores and fortune-telling at this shop. Hehe— it's a real hit”

Haruka said with a mysteriously cute signature pose.

Hmm.....?At breakfast, she did say she had a part time job in the morning.

That means, she had talked to the shop-owner yesterday.....

They allowed her to do suspicious business such as fortune-telling in the shop.....

What the heck is this skill? Is she a professional spy or something?

She was a very mysterious person to start with, and as time goes on, the mystery increases further.

“Fu..... apparently, my magical artifact was useful immediately”

“Yeah, no, thanks to you, I was saved. After all, in fortune-telling, appearance is also important! Getting the perfect outfit was super lucky! A sufficiently spooky robe like this is definitely not sold in stores!”

As I was perplexed by the conversation they were having, Kuroneko explained to me,

“Last night, she said she was fortune-telling at her part-time job, so I lent her some clothes to use as a costume”

“So that's how it is”

Kuroneko is really kind to Haruka.

Normally you wouldn't lend out the clothes you proudly made yourself.

Usually Kuroneko wouldn't even consider such a thing.

.....Since yesterday, Kuroneko has been meddling with Haruka more and more.

Strangely enough, I can understand that feeling.

I'm strangely tempted to be kind to her, like I can't just leave her alone.

Both me and Kuroneko, we shouldn't have such a kind personality.

“But, you're really talented aren't you?”

“Oh, you think so?”

“Yeah, I'm studying it too..... I was able to observe your fortune-telling, I can tell it was backed by very sophisticated knowledge and techniques. Certainly more so than me”

Huh, is that right. If the occult-loving Kuroneko says so, then I guess it must be true.

“Well, it seems that way”

Haruka smiled at Kuroneko's compliment.

This reaction, she must be very confident.

“I was taught fortune-telling by onee-chan. Hmm, I never thought it would come in useful in a place like this..... I guess you never know what life will bring.....”

“It's not like me to say this but..... I think I would get along with your onee-san”

“Ah—.....I think that's really true. Onee-chan has an ultra troublesome personality but..... Kuroneko-chan could, surely, no, definitely, make friends I think. It's a shame she's not here”

That's saying a lot. Someone who has good compatibility with Kuroneko would be pretty rare.

That girl is good at fortune-telling..... and likes the occult, maybe she's also chuunibyou.

“She must be a great onee-san”

“I guess so. Honestly, she's a really amazing person. But, well, me being here..... maybe a little, I can thank onee-chan for that..... Nhehe, it's kind of complicated”

She sounds like me.

I know how you feel. When you have a sibling that makes you angry, you want to complain about it.

Haruka turned up her palm and offered it to us.

“Ah, both of you sit down. I'm indebted to you, I'll tell your fortune free of charge.”

“Oh, is that okay?”

I obediently sat down in front of Haruka. Kuroneko also sat down next to me after a little hesitation.

With the table between us, Haruka faced us.

“Of course. Um, is love fortune-telling okay?”

“Ehh? I——..... I don't mind”

“H- hey..... Kuroneko.....”

“For fun. It's just for fun. There's no other meaning to it”

“Y- yeah..... right..... well then.....”

“Kyouzuke-kun, you're a pushover”

Haruka giggled.

“Shut up! Leave me alone!”

“Nhehe, all right, fortune telling show! Here we go”

Haruka exclaimed without an ounce of mystery, and held her hands over the crystal ball.

Ooh..... It looks like the ball is glowing dimly.

“Hey, is there a bulb or something inside it?”

I spoke to Kuroneko lightheartedly,

“.....? What do you mean”

“Eh, no, this ball is——”

“——I can see”

As if to interrupt our chatter, Haruka's voice reverberated.

And so our prior conversation was left unsettled.

Perhaps it's a fortune-telling technique, Haruka spoke quietly, so we were forced to listen.

Presumably from stashed inside her robe—— she took out her sketchbook and opened it with one hand.

“I'll show you the results in pictures”

The pen flashed quickly. Though we couldn't see from this side, you could tell she was drawing with considerable speed. Soon enough she put down the pen,

“Okay! It is done!”

She presented us with the open sketchbook.

“Ooh..... You're good”

“You're really multi-talented..... this is.....”

It's no wonder Kuroneko was surprised. What was drawn there was clearly the two of us.

What's more, the content is.....

Me in a tuxedo, and Kuroneko in a wedding dress, standing side by side.....

“Y- you!”

“Nhehe, for the two of you, it seems that such a future awaits. Does it please you, good sir~?”⁴⁶

“Y- you drew it to make fun of us!”

My face is hot. Recently, I've been getting teased a lot about my relationship with Kuroneko— but this time it's too much!

I'm so embarrassed, I can't even look at Kuroneko's face!

“Oh no, my pride as a fortune teller keeps me from telling false fortunes. This really is the future of the two of you— one of the possibilities”

“.....There's a possibility this won't happen?”

“Of course”

Haruka answered Kuroneko's question immediately. For some reason, she looked at me with narrowed eyes,

“Because Kyouzuke-kun is so flirtatious— I saw many futures of marrying other girls”

“.....Huh..... is that right”

“What horrible fortune telling!”

Why should I be blamed for something I haven't even done yet!

Kuroneko even gave me an icy look! Grrrr.....

“I mean, if we were married, I wouldn't be unfaithful!”

“Are you sure? You wouldn't want to travel alone with your little sister?”

“How do you know I have a little sister!”

“I'm a fortune teller”

Oh yeah! You're quite skilled!

“Kyouzuke-kun's little sister is super beautiful, very stylish, in the future, she will most likely be a popular model. I could see a future of success as an athlete but..... uwa, that's a pretty narrow gate. With enough luck, and by working herself to death, then she'll finally have a chance.....”

46 She calls him “okyaku-sama” which is a polite way to say “customer” or “guest”

“.....O.....oh”

She said so much about “the future that would likely be realised” that my heart was beating.

Seeing how surprised Kuroneko was, it seems that she hadn't leaked any information about Kirino.

I mean..... this person..... can't be a real fortune teller.

You can't explain this with cold reading.

Haruka asked me again,

“So..... Kyouzuke-kun, would you want to have an affair with such a super beautiful little sister?”

“I wouldn't do that!”

Don't say such disgusting things!

“Don't you want to travel alone with your sister?”

“I don't know about that”

“Hey senpai? Why don't you deny it?”

“No because, if she asks me for life counselling again or something..... that could happen right?”

“.....Huh.....that's right..... since it's you..... it's easy to imagine”

Why did your shoulders drop..... You don't have to be so depressed.....

Seeing us like this, Haruka spoke,

“.....Kuroneko-chan..... that's rough”

“He's like that..... I'm used to it”

Please stop using me as an excuse to bond with each other.

“So then—— I'll give you this picture”

“.....I'll get it later. If we take it now, it might get damaged”

“Sure sure. Well then, at the inn”

With a swoosh, Haruka put away her sketchbook.

I commend Haruka for changing the subject from my unfaithfulness,

“Even so..... that was pretty impressive. I don't know if this fortune-telling is correct but..... it was fun. I think I get how you can make money with this. You speak smoothly, like a real pro”

“Certainly, with such sociability it's hard to believe we're the same age”

Ah, Kuroneko has already heard what Haruka's age is.

That means Haruka is 16 years old?

“You're a student right?”

“Of course. It's just, I'm used to this kind of situation where I'm abandoned without any money.....
Ah, are you curious? About the background of the mysterious beautiful girl you met travelling, are you interested?”

Don't call yourself a mysterious beautiful girl,

“I'm not saying I'm not interested, but you're working, right?”

“Oops, that's right! Manager~ is it okay if I stop now——?”

Haruka stood up and raised her voice. Following her gaze, the bespectacled female shopkeeper gave an OK sign with a smile.

“Thank you very much! —So, I'm done with my part-time job. You saved me the trouble of meeting up with you!”

Kuroneko: “By the way, you had mentioned exchanging information about 'island folklore'. Just as well, we also wanted to talk to you”

“Really? Then do you want to stay here and talk?”

“That's fine, but you should order something too. Because you've become a customer”

“Ah, you're right”

Recently, Kuroneko has been acting a lot like an onee-san.

Actually, she's the eldest daughter of the Gokou family. Together, she and Haruka are just like sisters.

We waited for the iced coffee that Haruka ordered to arrive, and then got to the main topic. It was Kuroneko who started the conversation,

“Now..... Haruka, the situation has changed since this morning”

“Yeah, you said you wanted to talk with me—— I realise that something must have happened”

“I'm not sure if you'll believe this story.....”

I warned her. Just saying “the shrine we met at has disappeared” would sound like a joke.

“Ah, wait. If you're not in a hurry, before getting into the main subject, we should talk about me right? You were super interested right?”

She was struggling to hold back from gushing out what she clearly wanted to tell us. Kuroneko smiled at her and replied,

“Sure, please tell us about yourself”

“No, well um, you know why until now I've been so coy about hiding who I am? I wasn't sure how to explain it to you. I don't have any proof, and to be frank, I wasn't confident that you'd believe me”

Haruka gave a preface similar to mine.

She also seems to have an unbelievable story to tell.

“.....Fu..... so, after all you are——..... that kind of thing”

With an imposing voice and face, Kuroneko spoke as if she understood.

From her happy mood, I could somehow guess what she was thinking, but I let it pass for now.

Kuroneko: “Please continue. No matter what absurdity you say, I at least swear I won't laugh”

Me: “That's right. Me too, I won't make fun of you”

“Thank you.Then, I'll tell you”

Haruka took a deep breath in and out to calm her feelings——

“Actually I..... am from the future”

She confessed.

“.....”

“.....”

When we heard that, we all fell silent——

“.....You——.....”

Kuroneko opened her mouth first. With a stunned face,

“.....So you're not an alien”

“Aah, I absolutely knew that's what you believed”

I could smell it in everything she said and did.

“.....E- ueeh.....? That's too unexpected a reaction.....”

Even Haruka, who had confessed, was stunned,

“Um, well.....? So..... do you believe me?”

“Eh? Ah— Please wait a moment. I'm organising my feelings”

Kuroneko mumbled with a troubled face.

“.....I- if you had confessed that you were an alien, I was ready to accept that..... but you're from the future..... no way..... my perfect theory was incorrect.....?”

Kuroneko was (for a completely different reason than Haruka was worried about) quite troubled, but before long she looked up as if she'd reached a breakthrough. She spoke frankly,

“I believe you”

“Really!?”

“Yeah, really.Well, both aliens and time travel are similar in terms of plausibility. Besides—to be honest, it seems more interesting to believe.Did I offend you?”

“Noo! It's not like that!”

Haruka shook her head vigorously,

“Thank you! Kuroneko-chan, for believing me!”

Haruka wrapped both hands around Kuroneko's hand and shook it up and down.

Kuroneko looked confused and embarrassed. Haruka turned to me,

“Kyouzuke-kun? Can you believe what I said?”

“I said I wouldn't make fun of you, but I can't say I believe it”

I mean, it's way too crazy.

If you think normally, it seems like the runaway girl is just trying to deceive us by saying the right things.

But, I just had a mysterious experience a short time ago.

We also had an “unbelievable story” we were about to tell Haruka.

In addition, I got an incredibly accurate fortune told, common sense is wavering—

But still, if I were to suddenly say “I really believe you” like Kuroneko, it would be a lie.

“So.....”

“So?”

If Kirino asked for counselling about the same thing as Haruka just now.

I'm sure I would answer like this.

“I'll pretend to believe you”

“Umm?What do you mean?”

“I don't believe you, but I'll act as if I do believe you”

“What's the difference between that and believing me?”

“I won't have to lie to you”

“.....I.....see”

Haruka looked down.

“Not happy?”

“No..... I think it's much more sincere than saying 'I believe you' when you don't believe me. You're an honest person”

“No no, I just don't want to do anything that makes me feel guilty——”

Direct praise throws me out of tune. I clear my throat to hide it,

“Well, anyway” I said to get back on track.

“That's what our stances are”

I pretend to believe, and Kuroneko believes

Moreover, doesn't Haruka have something to tell us?

When I prompted her with a gesture, she smiled bashfully.

“Thank you”

An expression that made me feel proud to have caused it..... that kind of face.

“Then, I'll continue.Hmm..... First of all, the story so far, I guess. ——I came to Inumaki Island on a family vacation”

“A family location, in the middle of nowhere? In the future you're from, is it more developed I wonder?”

At Kuroneko's tsukkomi, Haruka twitched a little smile,

“It feels like the middle of nowhere in the future, yes. But, here, for my mom and dad, seems to be a 'place of precious memories'. At first they wanted to go alone—— they were talking about it but, ba..... onee-chan said she wanted to go because there's interesting folklore, she didn't read the air”

Were you about to call your onee-chan “baka”? Kuroneko spoke,

“Your onee-san..... loves the occult doesn't she”

“Yes yes. That person has nothing but unnecessary knowledge. Because she has zero psychic ability, it's insanely dangerous. She'll rush into an awful haunted place and almost get possessed by evil spirits, try to climb a mountain alone saying she was channelling, summon bad things with a half-baked ritual, as soon as I take my eyes off her she's going to die because she's a baka. Because she's a seriously baka sister!”

She spoke so fast! She sounds like a working man bad-mouthing the company he works for.

“R- really..... But, how do you manage to survive?”

“I'm the one! Every time! Wiping her ass~~~~~!”⁴⁷

Her eyes ><, it was a full-power assertion.

“Even though I'm not a ghostbuster or an exorcist or a shrine maiden or anything, always always always always, I'm having all kinds of awful experiences instead of onee-chan! I just have a little bit more psychic ability than most people! I'm just a very ordinary cute girl! My ability to deal with occult related incidents keeps on increasing damn it!”

Haruka gulped down her ice coffee.

Like a salary man drowning his sorrows. She's accumulated many grievances.

She slammed the glass down on the table,

“What do you think about this situation of mine Kuroneko-chan!”

“Eh? Umm..... I wish I had a little sister like you too”

“Accomplice!”

Swish! She pointed a half-crying finger at Kuroneko's face.

“Hnnn, my baka sister's accomplice is here too!”

“H- hey..... What are you doing Kuroneko. You're making her cry”

“.....Even if you say such things. Hey, Haruka”

“.....Uu..... what?”

“You're still in the middle of your story. It's just starting to get interesting, please talk to the end and then break down crying”

“You sound word for word just like onee-chan——!”

I thought it was mean too.

Like Kirino, otaku have a tendency to be selfish when it comes to the things they like.

47 Common expression in Japanese meaning “to clean up after somebody” (if you couldn't guess)

“You should apologize, Kuroneko”

“.....Y- you're right..... I'm sorry. That was an insensitive line”

“.....Ooh..... Rather, I'm sorry about this.Just now, I got a bit heated”

Haruka's cheeks were red. It seems she didn't mean to get so excited there.

I know how you feel. When I'm complaining about my sister, I get like that.

“So, umm..... where were we”

“The point where your onee-san is a troublemaker in the occult sense, and always getting you into trouble”

“Yes yes, that's right. —At the request of such an onee-chan, me and my sister would also go on our parent's trip. On this island, there's a legend about being 'taken by spirits”

.....So it's linked to that.

Apparently, even in the future, the folklore of Inumaki Island will remain intact.

“Because it's onee-chan, I knew if I left her alone, she would definitely be 'taken by spirits' and die. So I reluctantly tagged along too. Then, going around the island together..... researching the folklore..... Onee-chan said something really worthless..... What do you think?”

“Let's go and get taken by spirits' or 'I want to go to another world' maybe”

“Amazing! Correct! How did you know!?”

“Apparently your onee-san thinks a lot like me..... I thought about it myself. If I didn't have a reason to not be reckless..... I would almost certainly think like that”

“We were also just hearing about the folklore, we visited the museum”

“.....Hahaa, so.....”

Haruka rubbed her chin knowingly, then looked at Kuroneko,

“But, another world? That's not a phrase you'll find around this island is it?”

“It's an urban legend”

Kuroneko replied concisely.

“There is a rumour on the Internet that you can go to another world from Inumaki Island. Your onee-san must have known. Same as me. 'Taken by spirits' and 'another world', when these two phrases come up, of course you think like that”

— Maybe those who got “taken by spirits” went to another world.

—Maybe “Hiten-sama” is a person from another world.

“Good answer. That's exactly what onee-chan thought”

Haruka applauded gently.

“But now, Kuroneko-chan. Even though you had that much information, you still thought I was an alien didn't you? Why is that?”

“Because your name is the same as the alien heroine I'm about to write”

More precisely, it's the heroine you were thinking about setting as an alien.

“Ah, I see! You got caught up on my pseudonym, and started thinking about it that way—? Aha— I didn't consider that kind of effect. But, it makes sense”

“.....you just said 'pseudonym' out loud”

“Yeah, it's a pseudonym. My real name is— a •sec •ret♡”

Haruka smiled sweetly at my dumbfounded face.

Kuroneko narrowed her eyes and expressed her thoughts,

“.....You know 'future me' don't you?”

Because she knows Kuroneko, she was able to use the pseudonym “Haruka Makishima”.

Haruka loitered with her answer,

“.....Correct. Hehe, I feel like the criminal in a mystery right now. Let's get back to the story. Onee-chan said 'let's get taken by spirits and go to another world'. The motives were 'Because it looks interesting', 'because I'm curious', 'because I yearn for the extraordinary' —the usual”

At the lighthearted mention of Haruka's sister's motives, Kuroneko nodded sincerely and heavily.

It seemed to be something she could very much sympathise with. I asked,

“So what exactly did you guys do? Even if I had the same amount of information, I have no idea what I'd need to do to get 'taken by spirits”

“Do you know 'Kisaragi Station'?”⁴⁸

“? What's that?”

Responding to the question mark above my head, Kuroneko answered,

“'Kisaragi Station' is an urban legend that originated on the internet. If you're on a train, before you know it, you find yourself at 'Kisaragi Station', a station that doesn't exist in reality— that's the story”

“Yes yes, that that”

48 Creepypasta that originated from a thread on the 2channel Japanese messaging board

Haruka rejoiced with a sly gesture, as if she had gotten what she wanted,

“That kind of 'finding yourself in another world story' is a classic urban legend. Some of them even talk about specific methods and procedures to get to the other world..... Like the elevator thing, the hide and seek thing, or performing a ritual before you sleep, right”

Right, even if you say that.

I don't know at all. But if I look at Kuroneko, who does know, her eyes are sparkling,

“Senpai, 'The other world of Inumaki Island story' is the same type of urban legend. On the island, at a specific time, in a specific place, performing a specific action, and finally passing through the torii gate of the shrine. If you do that, you can enter the other world..... That's how it goes”

“The content is slightly different from the urban legends I know. Onee-chan told me..... When you pass through the torii gate, you can go to the 'hidden shrine'——”

““!””

“.....Wha- what? What happened?”

Haruka worriedly asked us as our expressions abruptly stiffened.

We looked at each other and nodded. Kuroneko spoke for both of us,

“We, a short time ago, had a strange experience——”

“.....I see..... The first time I met you guys, was at that place”

Having heard our story, Haruka was surprisingly calm.

“As you may know, Kuroneko-chan, the procedure described on the Internet is to perform a 'certain ritual' in all eight directions around the Inumaki Shrine. But, onee-chan was happily doing *something* in addition to that—— Since she's a master at causing occult trouble, I should have been more cautious”

She said in retrospect.

“..... After completing the procedure, when passing through the torii gate..... I had a really bad feeling. Because it was completely different from the 'Inumaki Shrine' I had seen when I did my preliminary research on the internet”

“.....'Hiten Shrine’”

Kuroneko muttered. Haruka nodded,

“It was that shrine where I met you guys. The sun was supposed to be high, but before I knew it it was dusk, there was no sign of any people, and I felt a tingle on the nape of my neck..... This is

bad I thought. The atmosphere was even worse than the haunted ruins where I almost died before”

This girl has gained experience like the hero of a battle manga.

“But onee-chan doesn't understand such things. She's the kind of brute-force baka that dies first in a horror movie. I frantically tried to stop onee-chan. Said we should turn back because it's dangerous. Said we definitely cannot pass through this torii. But, it had the opposite effect, she was so excited saying 'This must be the hidden shrine' and wouldn't listen to me at all——.....”

“.....So, what happened?”

When Kuroneko asked, Haruka laughed like an evil witch.

Like she was playing *somebody else*——

“Hmm. If you're so worried about me, you go through first' she said, and pushed me towards the torii gate! The I suddenly felt really dizzy——”

And she found herself standing alone in the empty grounds,

“Your nee-chan is super shitty”

“Right! Right! It's like, you've done it *again~~~~~!*”

Haruka really bit into my candid remark.

What's up with this woman who mixes the bad parts of Kuroneko and Kirino. It's too dangerous.

“Ah! But! Sometimes! Very rarely! She has some cute parts and good parts too! You'll understand if you met her in person!”

Since she started half-heartedly defending her, I apologized for being so frank,

“Sorry, I shouldn't say bad things about someone I've never met”

“N- no no! I'm the one who started talking like that.....”

Kuroneko: “I'm very curious since you were interrupted in a good spot, what happened after that?”

“Ah, yeah. Um..... When I looked back, onee-chan was gone..... I got really panicked searching for her. I searched all over the grounds and even opened the door of the shrine, but couldn't find onee-chan anywhere”

“.....Hmm..... At that point, did you think your onee-san was gone?”

“That's right. I just felt dizzy and it didn't seem like I had travelled anywhere. The surrounding scenery hadn't changed either. I only thought about the possibility that I had travelled a little later when I couldn't get in touch with my parents. I went down the mountain and visited a nearby house. I borrowed a phone and called my parents. But, I couldn't get through..... So I asked to see a newspaper——”

“It was a past date”

“Yeah”

“It's a standard move for time-slip stuff..... But, you, really, are a formidable force”

“I- is that right?”

Well, that's a normal reaction from Kuroneko.

For her, it would be impossible to visit a private house and collect information normally.

But, in fact, I didn't think it was possible for middle and high school girls to take optimal actions so smoothly.

I myself am not confident I could do the same as Haruka.

“Thanks to onee-chan I'm used to this kind of pinch..... Still this is my first experience of being sent back in time”

Me: “You said you met us.....”

“Right after that. I checked the grounds again and still couldn't find onee-chan. —Then, it looked like I would be here a while, so I'd better secure clothing, food and shelter for now. I thought I'd catch some items to sell. When I climbed a tree, oh— I noticed two people, I felt shaken and slipped”

“That's why you fell”

“Uh, I'm terribly sorry about that”

I feel like she became unnaturally polite in the middle of that line. Let's move on.

“No, it's fine. It had some benefits”

“Wawaa..... Jeez, ecchi— Kyouzuke-kun, you perv♪”

Haruka pointed at me teasingly. Contrary to her words, her cheeks were blushing.

It was strange that such a cute face didn't make my heart beat.

Incidentally, the current explanation sounds like it makes sense, if you put aside the outrageous elements.

But something felt slightly out of place. The part about Haruka being shaken and falling.

Despite the abnormal situation, Haruka had been calmly taking the optimal actions like a seasoned expert, so why would *just our appearance* shake her.

It seemed too weak as the reason for slipping and falling.

Even if you consider that Haruka knows “Future Kuroneko”, I still don't think it's enough.

“Let's sort this out. It's a mixture of speculation but.....”

Kuroneko spoke, raising her fingers one by one.

“One, 'Hiten Shrine' where we met is a 'place that shouldn't exist' like 'Kisaragi Station'. Two, 'Hiten Shrine' is a place deeply involved in Haruka's time travel. Three, 'The Hidden Shrine' was revealed by your onee-san, and Haruka has come to our time from the future. At that time, we were at the same place in this era, so we were able to set foot in 'Hiten Shrine'. Four, today we couldn't reach 'Hiten Shrine' because it has been sealed again.So far, I wonder if there is any difference from your opinion”

“I generally agree”

“So—— What are you going to do? Repeat the same process again to uncover 'Hiten Shrine'? Could you return with that?”

“If you don't mind, I'll investigate the 'island folklore' more deeply with you guys. Because..... how to resolve this situation—— I've been trying to divine it”

It was the natural course of action if her divination skills were genuine.

I mean, I just realised.

If you can tell your own fortune, that would explain some of Haruka's eccentricities.

To secure clothing, food and shelter in a place she doesn't know, she started catching beetles before she had a plan to sell them. She found the ideal part-time job extraordinarily quickly—— and so on.

It's not that she was lucky, Haruka's fortune telling may enable her to choose the best course of action for herself to some extent.

“What about telling your own fortune?”

In response to Kuroneko's question, Haruka casually grabbed a handful of tarot cards and scattered them on the table with a flutter. She spoke with a distant gaze,

“Correct the distortion'—— That's it”

Me: “That's brief. You were more specific when you told our fortunes”

“If I don't have enough information, it's like this. My fortune telling is reasonably accurate, but it's not all-powerful”

Kuroneko: “I wonder what 'distortion' is referring to”

“Changes caused by coming to the past, I think”

“Fuu..... It's called the 「butterfly effect」 ”

I think she wanted to use that word very much. Kuroneko said it like a catchphrase.

She continued to explain further,

“Someone from the future has come to the past—— Even if you don't do anything, just that will

change history. I wonder if that's what is meant by correct the distortion”

“Maybe. Umm..... I've explained everything”

Haruka seemed to be drawing back from the super-talkative Kuroneko. My friend, I'm drawing back too.

“I'm still curious about something. Why would you accompany us to correct the 'distortion'?”

“The more information I get from investigating the 'island folklore', the more detailed my divination will be. So I can gain better guidelines for action. And——.....”

“And?”

“I know the outcome of the 'incident' that happens at your camp”

““_____””

At her words, Me and Kuroneko lost our voices for a moment.

Does that mean—— something big will happen to us from here?

It's a statement from a self-proclaimed time traveller. I couldn't take it lightly.

“I think even if I don't do anything, my coming to the past will change the outcome of the incident. That's a very bad thing for me——a very very deadly thing. Therefore, even a brief fortune-telling can be clearly understood. I have to see through the outcome according to the original history. I think that's the 'distortion' that needs correcting”

Kuroneko: “So, is it okay for us to hear the details?”

“That would just make the situation worse”

“Really, then, I won't ask”

Me: “When will you know if the outcome is according to the original history?”

“The night of 'Hiten Festival'. I've got to do something before then”

Kukuku..... Haruka laughed like Kuroneko.

Then, suddenly raised her voice,

“So, here's my plan! Investigate the island folklore with you guys! And then—— ”

“Enjoy the past to the fullest——!”

Both me and Kuroneko were stunned by the unexpected proposal that came out.

“It's a serious situation isn't it?”

“That's right! It's like Haruka-chan's big pinch!”

“Is this the time to be enjoying yourself?”

“No, because this is a rare chance! To slip back in time to a past world— isn't that a super exciting situation!”

“That's true but.....”

If you're in trouble, you have to help or be helped..... I was about to say.

She can afford it. Kuroneko spoke,

“.....I understand. That's the kind of girl you are”

“Nhehe, there's no point in rushing things. Let's smile and laugh”

Haruka poked her dimples with the index fingers of both hands.

It's the kind of flirtatious pose that Kirino seemed to like,

“This is a rare mysterious experience— if I don't enjoy myself, it would be a waste! After I return, my mission is to brag to onee-chan and make her frustrated. 'Ri-nee! I went to the past and met a great person! Who do you think it was?' — I'll tell her! ”

Ri-nee must be her sister. Hinata-chan, Kuroneko's little sister, also used a similar name for her big sister. It's nice, seems very affectionate.

.....My sister just refers to me as “you”.⁴⁹

Suddenly, Kirino's face came to mind,

— “Kyou-nii♡”

Eugh, gross. Absolutely not.

While I was thinking about something else, Kuroneko said to Haruka,

“Um, there's something I've been wondering for a while now—”

“Hm? What's that?”

“Your reaction..... could it be that 'future me'—.....”

49 More specifically “anta” which is very colloquial and often considered rude

“Ah, oh no”

Haruka hurriedly covered her mouth with both hands.

“..... I see..... I'm convinced by that response”

“Wa, wa, wawa..... That is, it's not like that”

As Haruka became even more flustered. Kuroneko became more convinced.

“Fu..... Kukuku..... As I suspected, that's it..... You don't have to hide it okay?”

Kuroneko paused for a beat.

“..... 'Future me' will be a great person that everybody admires right?”

“.....”

Haruka's response was an awkward silence.

I tapped Kuroneko's shoulder, who had a face like “Huh? Am I wrong?”.

“You're already great”

I said.

After leaving the coffee shop, we went back to the Miura-inn for lunch.

Me: “—So, that's the impression we got”

“Well, it seems like you were able to research diligently”

The president listened to our report while eating sashimi.⁵⁰

The club members and Haruka surrounded the table to report on what had happened this morning.

Of course I didn't mention the “matter” we had discussed with Haruka.

Next, Akagi and the others, who were preparing for the festival, reported.

The otaku besides Akagi were complaining that “it's too hard” and “it's cruel slavery”. It seems they

50 Raw fish

had done various things including carrying the heavy portable shrine and decorating.

The atmosphere of “The president didn't need to keep quiet about us helping” and “it's the least we can do” was completely gone.

Anger was erupting at the shitty four-eyes that had imposed hard labour. Only Akagi, who must have worked the hardest, tried to soothe everyone saying “Now now”, and I realized once again that this guy is really a good guy.

As expected, the president was also apologetic,

“Th- then this afternoon, let's all play together!”

“Oh, nice idea!”

Since we're all here for the camp, playing together is very welcome.

After I agreed without hesitation,

“Well, I found a shop that looks interesting, so why don't we all go there?”

At the right moment, Akagi raised his hand and made a suggestion. It would be a life raft to the president.

Everyone agreed it was a good suggestion from that the guy who helped so much with the heavy lifting, and they decided to play by Akagi's direction in the afternoon. Of course, Haruka would join us.

“.....Phew—”

The president looked like a werewolf who had narrowly escaped execution, and was wiping away cold sweat.

Geez..... You should be the most grateful to Akagi.

So.

What was the "interesting thing" that Akagi found.

“General store..... No, candy store.....?”

“Yeah, I've only ever seen them in manga and stuff. It looks interesting, doesn't it?”

It was an old-fashioned private store. The rusty signboard gave off a sense of nostalgia.

There were several retro game cabinets sitting outside, and when I looked into one of them, I saw a 2D action game with yo-yo like weapons.⁵¹

It must be a famous title because the otakus were saying “wow—” and getting exciting.

51 Maybe Spinmaster?

They're playing games everywhere. As expected of the Games Research Club.

“Why are there games at a candy store?”

“Who knows.....”

Akagi and I looked at each other with tilted heads.

“Wow, there are all kinds of old fighting games! Ruri-chan, let's fight!”

“Ara, think you can beat me at a fighting game?”

“Mufufu, my Daimon-sama is undefeated in person. I also draw doujinshi, so my love is unmatched”⁵²

Next to the female member's strongest gamer competition, me and Akagi ducked through the sliding door that had been left open.

I'm sorry to have used the same expression many times since arriving on this island, but— after all, it's dim in here too.

I always miss bright convenience stores.

It looks like the doma of a private house has been turned into a store. The floor of the store was concrete, and I could see a living room in the back. There was a little old woman sitting on the floor.⁵³

“.....”

Because she just sat there and stared without saying welcome, I thought she was a ghost. Perhaps the old lady is the owner.

The store was chaotic with many products, in addition to the usual candy, there was also soap, detergents and other household items, and toys that I didn't recognise.

“Wow, I saw this somersaulting airplane toy in an old video ~~~~! Ah, is this a beigoma? I've never seen one before~~~~♪”⁵⁴

Haruka was cheering shrilly while looking at various toys.

If you believe her, they're “old toys”.

Maybe she's even more impressed than we are.

.....Haruka Makishima.

She didn't seem like a regular braggart, or a joker, or an extreme case of chuunibyou.

At the coffee shop, Haruka made a shocking confession, and Kuroneko was intrigued— so for me,

52 Presumably King of Fighters

53 Doma literally “dirt floor” is a ground level section at the entrance of a traditional Japanese house

54 Beigoma is a traditional Japanese spinning top toy. This is the origin of Beyblade

it was time well spent.

—**There's still a lot left to ask**

The future great person Kuroneko had said.

Due to time constraints, we had to interrupt the conversation..... but we'll talk about it later.

About the future, and about her.

“Kousaka-senpai, there's going to be a beigoma tournament outside!”

Makabe-kun's voice brought me back from my thoughts.

“Oh, I'm coming now!”

Well, okay. I'm not Haruka, but this is a precious summer vacation at a precious camp.

Let's enjoy this time now with all our hearts and minds.

In the scorching heat—.

We, the games club and one guest, were playing nostalgic games in front of the candy store. Beigoma, kites, flying styrofoam airplanes, playing retro arcade games and throwing water balloons at each other.

Because it was a large area with no traffic, we could play the traditional games that we couldn't play in our neighbourhood.

It's really fresh and interesting. To Akagi's credit.

Those who were tired of playing sat on the benches in front of the store and ate cold things like watermelon and shaved ice.

I'm also taking a break and biting into a watermelon.

I looked over and saw Kuroneko jumping up and down happily, having beaten Sena not only at fighting games, but also at beigoma.

You would never see her like that in the club-room.

.....That Kuroneko, is she good at beigoma too?

If it's a game that requires dexterity, I guess she can do anything.

“Haa”

Looking up, there is not a cloud in the blue sky. A loud cicada cries. The president screams as he's hit by a water balloon.

“Aah——.....”

——It feels like summer vacation.

“Summer vacation! That's what it feels like!”

Haruka sat next to me, uttering the same line I was thinking with a dynamic motion. *Crunch* she bit into the watermelon she was holding, and blew the seeds into a blue bucket.

“Have you ever had a summer vacation like this?”

“Nhehe, maybe in a game”

“I wonder if..... I've been to the countryside before—— ah no, it's my first time”

This summer is special.

Even though it's my first time doing a lot of this stuff, for some reason it feels nostalgic.

I'm sure that Haruka, Kuroneko and everyone must feel the same way.

“Hey, Haruka..... What year were you born?”

Since there was nobody else around, I asked a question I couldn't earlier.

Assuming it's true that she came from the future, I wonder how far. I was curious.

“Well”

As I expected, Haruka smiled and replied,

“That's classified information”

“? What's up with that?”

“Huh? You don't know? A famous line from a 'Beautiful girl from the future' that was popular around this time—— it's supposed to be”⁵⁵

“I don't know it. I'm not good with that stuff. ——So, what do you mean?”

“It means there's a reason I can't tell you. In my case, it's not that anyone is stopping me, but..... I've decided not to talk about things I feel I shouldn't talk about.When it comes to time-slip stories, bringing future knowledge into the past is bound to cause trouble right? Something like that”

That's why it's classified information—— Haruka placed a finger on her lips and closed one eye.⁵⁶

It was a gesture that could have charmed any man but me.

55 She's most likely referencing Mikuru from Haruhi Suzumiya

56 See above

Hmm.....? Haruka's date of birth is classified information.

Maybe it's the same reason she uses the pseudonym “Haruka Makishima”.

Information should not be passed to people from the past..... like me.

Information that will strengthen the "distortion".

.....Why is that? “History will change” or something like that?

Even if I think about it, I don't understand.

“I see, then I won't ask”

“Sorry”

“It's okay. Ah, but, is it okay to tell by fortune-telling?”

“That's rude. I'm not answering with knowledge from the future. I'm only saying what I've seen through proper divination”

Haruka puffed out her cheeks. She over-dramatically kicked her legs and stood up, saying “I'm going to play” while running over to everyone.

The games club members were now starting to shoot each other with water guns. There was no one on the president's side, and after receiving a barrage of fire from the members venting their frustration, he was soaked.

Nobody needs to see a see-through shirt on such a skinny guy!

Haruka headed for the battlefield, securing her water gun and loading it with water,

“Kuroneko-chan! Let's help the underdog——!”

“Kukuku..... looks like it's time to show off my skills trained in FPS.....”

After the two of them entered the competition, the number of participants increased one after another.

“Haha, somehow everyone has returned to being kids. —Hey, Kousaka, let's go too!”

Akagi walked up and threw me a loaded water gun.

I caught it and readied my stance,

“All right, then, I'll be on a different team than you!”

I shot Akagi, who was closest to me, in the face with a surprise attack.

“You bastard..... Kousakaa~~~~~!”

“Hahahaha! It's bad to be careless!”

Being immature, competitive, mischievous, and overconfident—.

I was back to the days when I was such a brat, and played around until dusk.

—And so another long day is ending.

When did the seemingly endless sunset turn into night.

I wasn't aware and I don't remember.

Late at night on the second day of the camp.

I'm lying face down on one of the futons laid out side by side.

I put my chin on the pillow and looked ahead to see the other's dishevelled faces.

Just a short time ago, we were playing card games in this position, but before we knew it, more than half of the club members seemed to have fallen asleep, probably because they were tired of playing.

Akagi stood up and pulled the string to turn off the lights.

And so, like the night of a school trip, we all faced each other to tell ghost stories..... it was that kind of position.

“.....Hey, you're still awake”

Akagi said in a hushed voice while standing.

I indicated that I wasn't asleep by lifting my upper body slightly.

He smiled and said,

“Alright, then whoever is still awake can talk about love”

“Are you a girl”

“Ba—ka, even men do that”

While we were talking, a group began to gather around.

By the way, the futon that Makabe-kun is sleeping on is directly in front of me—.

Akagi sat down with a thud, stomping on the sleeping Makabe with his ass.

“Oomf.....! Wha- what's going on!?”

“Hey hey, be quiet. You'll wake everyone up”

“A- Akagi-senpai is using me as a chair.....! Hey, he's really heavy.....! What are you saying!”

That Akagi is only hard on Makabe-kun.

I'm sure it's because he's concerned about his relationship with Sena..... Even so, it's tyrannical.

This guy is a good example of how not to behave. When my sister gets a boyfriend, I'll definitely be cool with it.

It's an easy victory. Rather, thank you for accepting that kind of sister.

Akagi, the painful sis-con, sat with his arms crossed on top of his kouhai, and answered the question,

“This is where we all talk about love. It's a staple for student trips—yes, Makabe goes first”

“Eehh!”

“Hey, you, tell me the truth. Are you aiming for Sena-chan? Well?”

“Akagi you- that's why you started the love talk”

I couldn't let it slip, he looked at me like “isn't that obvious?”

Makabe-kun's voice was pained,

“.....Aiming for, you say..... She's someone I'm interested in— Ouchhhh!”

That Akagi, put him in a pro-wrestling hold.

“Aah, what was that? Say that again?”

“Sena Akagi-san is, for me..... someone I'm interested iiiiiin!”

You've got guts, Makabe. That must have hurt a lot.

“Hmm, someone you're interested in huh”

On the other hand, Akagi looks like a demon.

“Hey, Makabe-kun. You know Sena-chan has 'that hobby'— and yet, you still say that kind of thing?”

“O- of course..... I..... do.....! Rather, that's, why.....”

“What do you mean?”

Akagi squeezed his joints while talking.

Makabe-kun..... tried to convey his intention in between strangely seductive screams like Oh♡
Oh♡

“I'm also, an otakulike, her..... so..... it's good..... to have a relationship..... where you can be open about..... your hobbies!”

“Hmm, you want to date an otaku girl, even if she's a fujoshi”

“That's..... half..... of it”

“Ah?”

“The other..... half is..... not logical..... doing club activities together..... I've come to understand her charm.....and come to like her..... that's all..... Gyah!”

Makabe-kun received a particularly strong blow from Akagi, and leaked out a yelp in his final moments.

“I understand. After all, my sister is super awesome——”

Akagi got off from Makabe-kun and noisily lay down on his futon. With a short final threat,

“Don't think it's easy to date her”

“.....Of course”

With that, it seems the top batter's love talk is over.⁵⁷

And then——

“Next is Kousaka-senpai's turn”

“Eh, me?”

I was confused being nominated by Makabe-kun. The president crawled towards us,

“Don't play dumb. Let's hear about how things are going with Gokou. We're all curious—— have you made any progress during camp?”

“Ah, Kousaka-senpai, please give us the details about your relationship with Makishima-san. Where on earth did you meet such a beautiful woman?”

“Hey Makabe you, are you trying to hit on other women even though you're aiming for Sena-chan?”

“Th- That's not right Akagi-senpai! B- but! Aren't you curious about the relationship between Kousaka-senpai and Makishima-san!?”

“Curious” “Very curious”

.....These guys.

“Geez..... But, even if you call it a relationship.....”

Apart from the “matter” I don't really have anything to tell them.

57 Literally says top batter in English. Baseball term implying the first one up requires courage

“Haruka is, basically, just a friend——”

“You're already calling her by first name, but she's 'just a friend'!? You really think an excuse like that will work!?”

Makabe-kun really, aren't you trying to take out your frustration with Akagi on me?

“It's not an excuse. Gokou and Haruka have good compatibility, and because I was there when they met—— it flowed that we started calling each other by first name. That's it really”

“What..... that's all it is”

“If that's it, aren't you too friendly?”

Makabe-kun seems to have been convinced, but Akagi is still suspicious.

“I'm wondering about that too. I feel a strange affinity with Haruka”

“So you get along well?”⁵⁸

“Maybe. Even though she's a divine beauty, that doesn't feel like a barrier, I can speak to her naturally, I feel like I have to protect her..... I can't really describe it”

“Hmm..... That's unusual for you”

“Hey——”

I don't have many female friends at school.

“Then next is my question”

The president repeats his previous question,

“Kousaka, how's progress with Gokou?”

“.....there's, not really any”

“I don't get it..... you went sightseeing together right?”

“That's right. She seemed to be engrossed in solving the folklore mysteries..... Then in the afternoon it became like that..... besides”

“What is it?”

“Personally, I want to support her efforts but..... as for romantic feelings, I'm not sure myself. For now I'm having enough fun, I think our relationship is fine as it is—— to be honest”

Because it's scary if you try to develop a relationship and fail.

It's fun when we're together. I want to stay with her forever. I hope times like these will last forever.

58 Literally “the horse fits” - expression referring to compatibility between horse and rider

That's why.

Because I get along with Kuroneko so well—

I don't want to make a big mistake and ruin it.

Such fear made me say a weak line. I'm not lying, but I'm sure I don't really mean it.

“You're a high school student, don't you want to go out with a girl no matter what?”

Akagi said that, but I retorted,

“Same goes for you. If you wanted to go out with someone, you could”

“Me? Argh—..... Until now I've been enjoying club activities. I didn't want to lose time by going out with someone. And now that I've retired in my third year— it's not like I can just go out with anyone. There's also exams coming up. I'll think about it if I meet someone or get a chance”

“Hmm.....”

“So, I guess I'm more interested in hanging out with you than getting a girlfriend”

Well, we're talking about love with guys like this.

With unpleasantly good timing, “Cha———a!” I heard a cheer from the girl's room.

I shuddered because it was Sena's voice.

We all looked at the wall and then at each other.

“Hey, what was that rotten howl.....?”

“Can you not refer to my sister's voice like it's blue magic or something?”⁵⁹

“.....More importantly, didn't it sound like it was coming from somewhere else?”

“Eh? Now that you mention it..... Hey Makabe-kun, what was that suspicious movement?”

“Ah no, that's.....”

“Confess! Take out what you just hid under your stomach!”

When I crawled up to him on all fours, Makabe was hiding his cell phone in a call state.

“Y- you..... th- that's..... no way!”

“.....Se- Sena-san said, if a love talk starts in the boys room, to call her secretly”

“Why are you calling Sena-chan by her first name!”

59 As far as I can tell this is a Final Fantasy reference, which seems odd for Akagi. Blue magic is monster abilities

“I- I'm just calling her by first name to not confuse her with Akagi-senpai!”

“You're just using that as an excuse to call her by first name!”

Akagi put Makabe-kun in a choke-hold, but I wasn't interested in that.

I grabbed his face as he was being strangled and asked in a panic,

“Hey! From when! When did you start the call!”

“Immediately after my tuuuurn.....!”

So— if there is a cell phone in here in a call state, it means that..... our love talk was leaked to the girls' room.....

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Dangerous~~~~~!

I haven't said anything yet that a girl wouldn't want to hear, have I!

Before I said it, I changed the subject to Akagi!

Ah..... thank goodness. I'm seriously glad that Akagi said something that Sena would misunderstand.

If we continued the love talk as it was, I think I might have said something like “I like Kuroneko” given the flow of the conversation. I'm sure she would have heard me say that.

If that happened, it would be too awkward to look at her face!

“Ha.....phew.....”

I managed to calm myself down.....

“.....Kousaka-senpai..... h- here.....”

Makabe-kun gasped, holding out his cell-phone.

Sensing his intentions, I took it and held it to my ear.

Then Sena spoke,

“Ah, Kousaka-senpai? It's me”

“What's up? Makabe-kun will be killed by your brother because of your plot”

“That's fine but”

Sena whispered so as not to be heard.

“Ruri-chan seems depressed..... please patch things up later”

“Eh? Wha- what's that.....”

“.....Huh..... Please reflect on your words and actions”

Ba-ka. She scolded me and then hung up.

The next morning—

We all gathered in the garden of the inn and did radio calisthenics to relax our bodies.

Aching muscles from festival preparations, sunburnt skin, rubbing sleepy eyes.

Each to their own, it's a refreshing morning for all.⁶⁰

There was no sign of Haruka. Come to think of it, I think she left in a hurry earlier

I hear a nostalgic voice coming from a radio that is so battered it's a wonder it's still working.

“I haven't done this since elementary school”

While moving my body, I tried to talk to Kuroneko but—

“.....”

I- I was ignored.....

“H- hey.....”

“.....”

This time, she blatantly averted her gaze.

H- huh.....? That's strange.....

I don't remember doing anything to offend her at all.

—Please reflect on your words and actions

I don't know, Senaaa~~~~.

Shit, why can't women just tell me things clearly?

What came to my mind was the face of my sister, who had always pushed me around with her unpredictable words and actions.

60 Literally “10 people 10 colours” is an idiom sometimes translated as “different strokes for different folks”

—You're better than that!

I slapped my cheeks with both hands,

“.....Hey”

I spoke to Kuroneko again.

“If you're acting weird, it's because I've done something wrong, right? Sorry. No matter how much I think about it, I can't figure out what it is. If I don't know, I can't apologise. So..... can you tell me?”

“.....I'm sorry”

What came back from Kuroneko was an apology.

“I don't know what Sena told you but..... it's not your fault at all.I'm just worrying on my own”

“..... Is that so?”

“Yeah, I'll get better soon, don't worry about it”

Kuroneko smiled weakly as she spoke.....

It's impossible not to worry —even if it's really not my fault.

I'm worriedabout you.

If only I had had the courage to say what was on my mind, the problem may have been solved here.

“What are we doing today? This afternoon, we're going to do some more research right?”

At this point, I chose to ask a harmless question and see what happens.

“That's right. But.....”

Kuroneko answered while doing radio exercises with awkward movements.

“I think I'll go fishing in the morning”

“Fishing? In the sea?”

This has nothing to do with the conversation but..... her body is so stiff. She doesn't get enough exercise.....

“Yeah, that's right. I have something I want to think about alone a little.....”

“.....I see”

When she emphasized that she was going alone, I was afraid to ask, "Can I come with you?"- I couldn't say anything more.

Even after going back inside, I felt hazy for a while——

“I'm going out for a bit!”

I told Makabe-kun, who was writing on his laptop, and I left the inn.

I walked towards the sea. At first I walked fast, then gradually started to run.

The view of the ocean from the hill was a pleasant sight this morning too.

The morning sun reflected off the surface of the water, making it glitter dazzlingly.

Soon after I started moving, I could feel my cloudy mind clearing up.

I'm doing what I want to do—— I can clearly see that now.

I'm going to her. As soon as I decided that, it was like this.

.....After all, to me, Kuroneko is——

Gradually, little by little, my feelings became clearer.

It felt good.

“Well, I wonder where Kuroneko got to”

The sea is everywhere, so I don't know where she's fishing.

For the time being, I headed towards the harbour where we arrived at the island.

There must be a beach near the harbour. Let's ask at the beach house where you can fish.

I arrived at my destination.

I looked around, but there was no sign of Kuroneko.

Compared to the beaches in Chiba I often go to, there were fewer people swimming.

Maybe because this island is not a tourist destination.

It's not crowded at all, and the view is heavenly and exhilarating.

I recognised a group of games club members playing split the watermelon.

Despite such a scene, I kicked off the sand with long strides and headed to the beach house.

“Excuse me”

Before asking where the fishing spot was, I thought I should buy a drink, so I called from behind the female clerk who was roasting corn.

She turned around,

“Oh? Kyouzuke-kun. Welcome”

“Huh, Haruka..... what are you doing here”

“My part time job of course”

Nhee, she smiled casually.

—We had a similar exchange yesterday..... kind of.

Now Haruka is wearing just a bikini and a light jacket, so I don't know where to look.

When she noticed my gaze, she lowered her eyes to her chest.

“Hmm, this swimsuit? It's nice right~ The person selling it here gave it to me cheap as a promotion”

Haruka turned bright red and grinned.

I'm not sure if she's embarrassed or teasing me.

“Kyouzuke-ku~n..... Just now, did you look at my chest with ecchi eyes?”

“I- I didn't look!”

“Sure su—re. You're a boy right, you can't help but be captivated by the figure of a divinely beautiful girl in a swimsuit. After all, I'm divine! Fuhehehe.....”

You were listening to last night's conversation too! Gaah..... that's pretty embarrassing!

Shit, she's smiling just like a happy Kirino.

“So what do you think of this swimsuit! I'm pretty confident in my style, though!”

“I- I don't know!”

I suddenly pulled my gaze away from her chest and tried to change the subject.

“Your part time job..... What about the coffee shop?”

“Today is a day off. So, I'm working here”

“Ah, I see. You're a tough kid”

If you look at the shelves of the beach house, mixed with the sea bathing products, rhinoceros beetles and stag beetles were on sale.

.....It's probably something like that.

“By the way, have you seen Kuroneko?”

“I haven't seen her, is something up?”

“Kind of, I'm looking for her. She said she went fishing, so I thought I'd ask here..... You're not a

local, you don't know any places you can fish do you?"

"I do know"

"Seriously!?"

"I was told by the fishermen at the harbor. I was wondering if I could catch fish and sell them. But I was told not to"

She has superhuman communication abilities. Like the main character in a life sim game.⁶¹

"So, the fishing spot is..... over there"

Haruka said while pointing her finger.

"If you walk along the beach, you'll see people fishing, I think you'll find it pretty quickly"

"I'll go, thank you"

"Okay. You have until this afternoon to make up with Kuroneko-chan"

"How do you know"

"Because I'm a girl"

"Then, give me a drink that would make a girl feel better"

After throwing a 500-yen coin, Haruka catches it with a *pashing* in her right hand.

"There's no such thing. —Is Ramune okay?"⁶²

"Yeah"

"Roger"

Haruka takes out two bottles of Ramune from the refrigerator, holds them in one hand, and hands them to me.

I was about to take them when—

The bottles slipped through Haruka's hand and tumbled onto the sand.

With a crack, it seems the bottles collided with each other and broke.

Ramune stained the sandy beach.

"Ack..... I goofed. That's funny..... I thought I had good grip..... Sorry! I'll get you a new one now!"

61 Literally "slow life game" - stuff like animal crossing, harvest moon etc.

62 A Japanese bottled lemonade drink

“.....Haruka..... You.....”

“Hmm? What's going on?”

Haruka stood still, puzzled. Thanks to this, I could see it clearly.

“Your, hand——”

“Hand?”

I knew I wasn't mistaken. I opened my mouth, stunned.

“Isn't it transparent? ”

“!”

Haruka shook with surprise and raised her right hand in a panic.

Like clear ice, her palm was transparent and I could see through it.

“Gyah—! What is this!”

“.....It's transparent”

“.....It's transparent huh”

Seriously seriously—— Haruka and I stared at each other through her transparent palm.

“H- hey..... This is”

I remembered Haruka's words,

“I think even if I don't do anything, my coming to the past will change the outcome of the incident. That's a very bad thing for me——a very very deadly thing”

Now it looks like that “deadly thing” is happening to her.

I'm afraid that her whole body will become transparent and disappear any moment.

“_____”

With a strong chill, I felt panicked.

My sister is no longer in Japan. I can't see her anymore.

I felt a similar turmoil to the time when I was told that, it gave me goosebumps.

Then I realised,

“Kyoussuke-kun!”

Kirino's— no, Haruka's face was right in front of me.

“Whoa!”

As I leant backwards with a start, she spoke.

“So then, you! You fell in love with me didn't you!”

“Huh!?”

Haruka closed her eyes tightly and hid her bikini-clad breasts with her arms.

“Kuuu..... I wasn't careful~..... I didn't think..... You would be struck by my swimsuit..... I thought it might be a little bit too bold but..... To seduce Kyoussuke-kun instantly, I underestimated my charm..... I remembered an episode from an old classic movie, I should have been more careful.....”

“What do you mean I fell in love with you!”

Go back to the serious atmosphere!

I retorted inwardly, but that was the end of Haruka's high tension,

“Ooh..... Wha- what should I do.....”

Like air escaping from a balloon, she quickly became dejected.

“H- hey..... Are you okay?”

As I worried about her drooping head, she spoke with a small voice without looking up.

“Kyoussuke-kun..... You didn't really fall in love with me did you?”

“Don't make me repeat it”

“Sorry..... but..... let me make sure. Kyoussuke-kun, promise me— no matter what, you don't have any romantic feelings for me”

I could sense this was important.

So I took the time to ask myself.

Then say it clearly.

“I promise. No matter what, I don't have any romantic feeling for you”

“.....Thank you. I believe you. Now then—”

I waited, somewhat nervously, for her words.

I felt the same tension as when my sister would thrust unreasonable demands on me.

However, the words that came out of Haruka's mouth were——

“Comfort me”

“Heh?”

“I'm depressed and in trouble, comfort me”

Is this really the time for that.

Still, I'm sure it's true that you're depressed.

Like a long time ago—— like I did for my sister.

I put one hand on her head and stroked it. Rather, there was nowhere else I could touch.

She's wearing a swimsuit. And then.....

Keeping her head down, she put her arms around me and hugged me.

“H- hey.....”

“Even if I do this, you won't fall in love with me right?Then, I just need ten seconds, then, I'll be back to Haruka-chan as usual.Just a little..... Let me recharge”

“.....”

Even though her huge breasts were pressed against me, I didn't feel like that at all.

I heard Haruka's voice dubbed as a certain angry person.

I did as I was told and continued to stroke her head.

Before long, after exactly ten seconds, Haruka raised her head.

What was there was her familiar, somehow nostalgic, usual smile.

“Is that enough? ”

“Yeah, thank you”

She slowly tried to let go.....

“_____”

Her whole body stiffened.

“?”

I turned around to see what was behind me.

“.....What are you doing?”

Kuroneko was staring with a straight face as we hugged each other.

Chapter 4

It was noon, with the scorching sun beating down on us from above.

After lunch, me, Kuroneko and Haruka headed to the town hall to investigate the island folklore.

On the way——

“Th- that's why! It was a misunderstanding! Kyouzuke-kun was just worried that I was depressed——”

“You don't have to repeat yourself, I get it”

“B- but, Kuroneko-chan is still angry right?”

“I'm not angry”

“Y- you're angry”

The scene unfolded before me, Haruka persistently addressing Kuroneko, who briskly kept walking straight ahead.

As you can see, the misunderstanding on the beach has already been resolved. I explained it right away.

But.....

Even after the misunderstanding was resolved, Kuroneko seemed somewhat listless, even though we're together like this, she wouldn't talk to me or even make eye contact.

If I talk to her, she responds at least.....

The situation was even more awkward than in the morning. I was in a hurry to do something about it.

And the problem isn't just the relationship between me and Kuroneko——

Kuroneko: “Haruka, now is not the time to talk about this”

That's right.

“Aren't you..... maybe on the verge of disappearing from existence?”

I witnessed her palm becoming transparent on the beach.

I think that's the exact phenomenon Kuroneko is talking about now.

It seems that she made a mistake and the “distortion” became stronger.

It's definitely not a magic trick. I saw it with my own eyes. I said that I would pretend to believe her—— but I already believe her more than 60%.

“It's okay. It's not transparent any more”

Haruka waved her right hand to show us.

“For now, it looks like I'm not going to disappear any time soon. I don't even know if disappearing is a bad thing for me in the first place. —Maybe it's not a sign I'm disappearing, maybe it's a sign I'm returning home, right?”

She smiled gently to show she was okay.

I don't think she means it. It's just a pose to reassure us.

Kuroneko knew that much, and didn't push the matter,

“Do you have any idea what caused it?”

“Very much so, but I can't explain it”

“Right. Then what can we do?”

“For now, I'd just be grateful to continue the investigation as planned! Don't worry! We'll do great!”

Haruka said cheerfully.

Despite the unusual trouble of her body becoming transparent, Haruka had no hesitation.

She acted with conviction. It came through in her attitude and words.

Yare yare, it's troublesome.

We want to help Haruka, but neither me nor Kuroneko can do much for her. I told her,

“I see. Then..... If there's anything you want us to do, feel free to tell us”

“Thanks..... I will”

While we were talking, we arrived at the town hall.

“First of all, photos”

Even in times like this, we must not forget the purpose of coming to the camp.

I took a few pictures of the exterior of the town hall and looked up at the building again.

Compared to Chiba City Hall, which I know well, it's really small, both horizontally and vertically.

It looked more like a neighbourhood post-office.

As soon as we entered the building, we checked the map of the inside and took the stairs up to the second floor.

Our destination was at the end of the hallway.

“So this is the library”

In a nutshell, it was a place like our high-school library. It was not very spacious, and seemed

slightly cramped. The scent of old books drifted softly in the air. Behind the simple reception desk was a row of tall bookshelves.

The lights embedded in the ceiling illuminated the room in white through the gratings.

This place is open to the public and apparently has a variety of materials about the island available for viewing.

Kuroneko, who was walking ahead, looked around lightly and spoke to Haruka,

“Now then, since I'm here..... I was thinking of hitting some past newspaper articles”

“No problem”

“What kind of articles should we be looking for?”

When I asked, Kuroneko's gaze wandered suspiciously for a moment.

What should I do if he talks to me even though it's awkward— That's the feeling I got.

Even so, she managed to move her mouth to answer.

“If any people have been 'taken by spirits' in recent years. No, I want to find out if it's really happening”

It seems that her ill feelings towards me have not disappeared.

I guess she's decided that there's more important things at hand,

“.....If there are any people that have disappeared from their original time period, like Haruka.....”

“Ah—..... From the outside, that would look like getting 'taken by spirits’”

“Right? So, if there has actually been a missing person case that could be called 'taken by spirits', and the victim has returned safely afterwards— I'm curious”

From the sounds of it, Kuroneko is firstly thinking 'taken by spirits' is just a written legend, and has never actually happened— isn't it just what people used to say in the past?

It seems that's what she suspects.

It's surprising. Even though she loves the occult, she's investigating sceptically. It's a clever idea.

“Suppose that being 'taken by spirits' is the result of 'time travel'. If there are people who have come back and are still living on the island, we might be able to talk to them. It could be a good hint for Haruka's return”

“.....Thank you, Kuroneko-chan”

Haruka dripped out a few words.

“Wha- what's up with you all of a sudden?”

“Because..... you really..... seem to be thinking about me seriously”

“.....H- hmm. It's also research for the game scenario..... I'm just acting out of curiosity”

You could tell in 0.1 seconds.

She's just hiding her embarrassment.

She's too easy to understand..... Just now, even though I'm in an awkward situation with Kuroneko, I almost burst out laughing.

“Even so. Any ordinary person wouldn't believe my story to begin with— and even if they did believe me, they wouldn't be so kind. So, thank you”

Haruka looked at Kuroneko and me respectively and thanked us.

Kuroneko turned her back to her, and spoke with a shrewd voice,

“Talking is a waste of time, let's get started”

Both Haruka and I noticed that the tips of her ears were red.

And then—

We spent about three hours researching in the library. Now we've spread the materials on the long desk in the reading space, and sat on folding chairs as we each reported the results.

“.....There wasn't any such missing person”

Kuroneko: “Yeah..... you're right”

It's not like there were zero missing people.

There were just no article to support the occurrence of getting "taken by spirits" on the island.

“But..... this article..... this one too..... please take a look”

The two articles that Kuroneko put on the desk were small, solved cases that occurred at the "Inumaki Shrine".

The circumstances of the two incidents were almost the same: a young woman from outside the island went missing for a very short time, and was found unconscious and collapsed in the grounds of Inumaki Shrine later that day.

When she woke up, she lost her memory of the last several hours, but she was not injured and no money was stolen.

“These are the only two that could be associated with being 'taken by spirits”

“These people got 'taken by spirits' like me and returned—— is that what you think Kuroneko-chan?”

“I wonder.Honestly, I think it's unlikely. It may just happen that there was a similar sounding incident”

“Hmm.Even so, I feel a little better. —Because there may have been people who returned safely. —Thank you both for your help!”

“.....You're welcome”

Kuroneko smiled gently.

They seemed to be exchanging a warm concern for each other.

“But.....”

Haruka looked down and whispered inaudibly to herself.

“..... I see, so that's a possibility”

“Haruka?”

Kuroneko peered at Haruka's face.

Then she spoke,

“If that's the case.....”

She suddenly raised her head and looked straight at us.

“We have to have extra fun! Right! Because our time together is precious!”

Me: “Hey hey, getting depressed and then enthusiastic by yourself..... What is this?”

“Hehe— It's nothing! Just talking to myself! A •ny •way—— ”

She put both hands on the table and leant forward.

“Again, let's do it! Let's have the best summer vacation! Me and you guys! Everyone! Let's make it an amazing week that we'll never forget!”

At the sudden high tension, Kuroneko blinked in surprise.

I responded instead.

Reverting to my childhood, I couldn't help but turn back into a shitty little brat and speak irresponsibly.

“That's what I was planning from the start”

“That's it! I have a plan. —Leave it to me!”

I've been robbed of my catchphrase.

Fuhehe – the laughter that filled the library gave me *deja vu*.

And so this day too comes to an end.

This trip, in which each day feels like several, is slowly approaching its midway point—

Once again, a new morning has arrived.

As I stretched my body while listening to the singing voice on the radio, I had a positive feeling. Exercising in the morning is a really good habit. It makes me feel like I'm back to my childhood.

“Big announcement! This time, I, Haruka Makishima, have been appointed to be in charge of recreation at your camp!”

Haruka announced loudly in front of everyone who had finished the radio calisthenics.

I glanced at the president's face, and he nodded humbly.

Apparently, the president was aware of this.

Honestly..... That Haruka is so familiar with the games club that it's easy to forget she's an outsider.

“Haruka you, can you really afford to be doing that?”

When I asked anxiously, a lively reply came back.

“Hehe— I told you we would play with all our might. Besides, this is the best course of action for me. —Well, that's why!”

Haruka turned to everyone and raised her voice again.

“Today, we're all going swimming in the sea—!”

That's what happened.

Me, Kuroneko, and of course the other members who didn't know the situation, obeyed obediently.

We changed into swimsuits and gathered on the beach, everyone playing together— didn't happen, we formed into groups and decided to act freely.

But.....

“Kousaka-senpai, take Ruri-chan please”

“We're going to swim over there! We'll have a race! Leave Kuroneko-chan who can't swim to Kyouzuke-kun! Well, that's that then~”

Before we knew it, the games club members had run away, leaving only me and Kuroneko.

I watched them with a dumbfounded expression—

“.....You can't swim?”

I glanced sideways at Kuroneko.

“.....Sorry I guess”

She pursed her lips in a pout and avoided making eye contact—

Right now, she's wearing only a bold bikini. She would never choose something so revealing on her own, maybe this is also Sena's selection.

She had been looking embarrassed for a while, which made her look even more erotic.

I can barely look at her swimsuit figure.

I keep my eyes on a vague area.

“If you want. I can teach you? Swimming”

“.....Right, well. Since this is a good opportunity..... please do”

As she said "please" she turned away, and I couldn't help but giggle at her tsun.

“.....What are you laughing at?”

“No? It's just, I remember when we first met. You see, like today, the old Kuroneko used to really keep her distance from me..... like you were on guard”

“Is that's right I wonder”

“It really is”

I scratched my cheek,

“It's nostalgic but, even so, I prefer the usual you”

“Really”

Kuroneko started walking towards the sea.

A curt attitude, as if she hadn't heard my voice.

“What's the matter, senpai”

From there she turned around,

“You're going to teach me how to swim right?”

For the first time in a long time she smiled, and I was captivated.

Attentively teaching her to swim——⁶³

After Kuroneko got tired, we went back to the beach to build a sand castle together.

Halfway through the construction, everyone who returned came to help.

The result was an elaborate work of art that would be a shame to see destroyed.

At midday, I sat with Kuroneko at the beach house and ate yakisoba.⁶⁴

We spent the afternoon playing in the water.

We didn't have a moment to feel bored, even when things slowed down, we were continuously busy playing.

Before I knew it, it was evening, and before I knew it, it was night——.....

As soon as I crawled under the futon, drowsiness filled my whole body.

When I was a kid, it was always the same.

Every day was like this.

Just before I fell asleep, I thought to myself.

—Ahh..... today was fun too.

The next day in the evening, when everyone returned to the Miura-inn.

63 Literally “with hands and feet” which is an expression that can mean to teach or help with great care or detail

64 Fried noodles in sauce

“Hey everyone! Tonight, we're having a test of courage~~~~~!”

Haruka said such a thing.

After a moment's hesitation, I spoke,

“Test of courage..... Can we do that so suddenly? They require preparations”

“It's, all— fine♪ There's no mistake! I already talked to president-san and Sena-chan, I'm not planning to do anything big, so there's no problem with preparations”

With a thud, Haruka dropped a lottery box on the dining room table.

“Just this and a pair of flashlights and everything is okay! —So how about it everyone!”

She's a pushy girl. But, well, it's true that I'm grateful for a passive person like me to have someone like her in our group.

If you look around, everyone seemed interested and there was a positive trend of wanting to try it. I guess it can't be helped.

A mood maker who radiates sunshine to the people around her.

Haruka Makishima seems to be such a girl.

Incidentally, there is also the opposite type of girl at this camp,

“.....Isn't a test of courage kind of dangerous?”

Of course I mean Kuroneko.

A gloomy person who cannot and will not pander to those around her.

However, that kind of girl, for me,

Haruka: “Of course, I've already checked out the course”

“That's not what I mean..... don't you get it?”

“.....Yeah, I get it. It's really fine, *there's no danger*”

I don't think she's inferior to Haruka. Don't think she would lose to a bright and cheerful beautiful girl.

She's hard to please and often silent, it's difficult to know what she's thinking.

She just doesn't express it, so it's hard to tell.

Even if she can't make an exciting scene, she's always thinking of her friends.

“Right, then, that's okay”

Ruri Gokou is such a girl.

The course for the test of courage is to go up the mountain to Inumaki Shrine, take the tag that Haruka left by the torii gate, and go to the finish line near the shrine.

At the finish line, the president is waiting, so you give him a tag and wait for everyone to come.

Indeed, Inumaki Shrine has a certain atmosphere— after all, it's a real haunted location— there are lights along the way, even at night, so there's little danger.

According to Haruka, there was no need to worry about the dangers unique to haunted locations.

So, there shouldn't be any problems.

After the test of courage is over and we have all gathered at the goal, we plan to have a handheld fireworks in the grounds.

Of course, we got permission to use fireworks.

Well, that's why.

I am now advancing through the course of the test of courage, alone with Kuroneko.

“.....Senpai, that lottery that Haruka prepared..... was fraudulent”

“.....I guess so”

Walking side by side, we pointed our flashlights forward, illuminating the path at night.

However, there are outside lights at regular intervals, so it's not that dark.

A little anxiously, we moved forward.

Not really meant to be scary, it was a very safety oriented, playful, gentle test of courage.

That sort of journey. Kuroneko spoke with an emotionless tone.

“I guess so'?You say that like it's someone else's problem?”

“.....Umm, Kuroneko? What do you mean?”

That's right. After that, we drew lots— and as a result, me and Kuroneko were paired up.

You draw a triangular lottery ticket from the lottery box, each ticket contains a letter of the alphabet, of which there are two of each.

Kuroneko spoke like a great detective,

“It's a very simple trick. For each pair of letters, a slightly different folding technique was used. Have the target person pull the first lot, then immediately after draw the next one yourself, and

search for the same fold with your fingertips”

“..... Aah, you really figured it out— and so?”

I played dumb while prompting her to continue.

“At that time..... the one that drew their lot right after me, was senpai. In other words..... it was..... something like that..... wasn't it?”

For some reason, Kuroneko's voice wavered bashfully.

“I've been found out”

I readily admitted it. She spoke with a fading voice,

“.....Why would you do that”

“Because I wanted to be paired with you”

I answered clearly. There's no room for misunderstanding.

“Look, since the other day. Things have been a bit awkward between us. Thanks to everyone's concern, it's been improving little by little but..... still, there's been a bit of an ill feeling hasn't there? That's why, with this test of courage, I just want to make up with you. —So, I've been talking with everyone”

“Eh..... Then.....”

“Everyone's in on it but you. I didn't know what kind of activity we would be doing— I was just taught 'an easy trick I remember to make a pair in a lottery'”

“So it's Haruka's doing”

“Yeah, that's right. In order to make up with Kuroneko— we're cooperating”

Hehe, a giggle.

Kuroneko spoke briefly with a gentle expression,

“.....I see”

There, for a short time, the conversation paused. The two of us walked side by side through the night.

Only the sound of humble insects. Sometimes the wind rustled the tall grass.

My throbbing heartbeat was surely not from fear.

“.....Here's the proof tag”

Kuroneko found a wooden tag leaning against the torii gate and picked it up.

“Let's see” I said as I watched beside her.

It seems that a plain ema had been re-used. A picture of a distorted female ghost with a speech bubble was drawn on it.⁶⁵

Female ghost-chan says,

— “Did you make up properly?”

It felt as if a certain person was speaking in my ear.

“Honestly, so meddlesome”

“Senpai, can you say that about people? Why don't you reflect on your usual behaviour?”

She hit my weak point, so I whistled to dodge the question.

“.....”

A moment of silence lay between us.

Like Kuroneko, I'm not a talkative person either, so this often happens when we're together.

It's not awkward. If anything, a nervous feeling.

Kirino might say, it's like the release date of a game you're looking forward to.

Maybe this is how the otaku who stand in line for midnight sales feel.

I was about to speak to Kuroneko, but at that moment, she sat down on the stone steps.

“.....”

I also sat down next to her in silence. Still, there was no conversation.

The night breeze like tepid water, carried the scent of after a bath.

As I fought the dizzy feeling, Kuroneko broke the silence,

“.....Senpai”

“Hm?”

“Will you listen to what I have to say?”

“Yeah, of course”

65 Ema – small wooden plaques on which Shinto worshippers write their prayers or wishes and hang from the shrine

I answered immediately, but Kuroneko did not speak readily.

I just waited patiently.

Neither I, nor Kuroneko, looked at each other's face, but sat and kept our gaze forward.

Not looking anywhere in particular. It's pitch black in front of us.

For no particular reason, I turned off my flashlight and closed my eyes.

“I was avoiding you, not because I misunderstood when I saw you hugging Haruka”

Eventually, I heard a quiet voice beside me.

I didn't look at her, but listened in silence.

“Then, why.....”

“Haruka is..... really..... a good girl”

“.....Yeah”

She was struggling, her words were disjointed and difficult to understand.

Still, I'm patient.

“Too much..... such a good girl, I was depressed”

I quietly collect the pieces in order to assemble the puzzle in my brain.

“Cheerful, so cute, overflowing with vitality, fun to be around..... Even for me, she's easy to get along with. Compared to that.....I lost my confidence”

“.....”

“So, I didn't misunderstand from the start. I just thought ah, obviously”

Waiting for her words, I inwardly shuddered at the unsettling pieces I had gathered.

Kuroneko was suddenly self-deprecating,

“It's only natural that you would fall in love with Haruka”

“Wait wait wait wait! Wait a minute!”

Don't tell me to be patient! I raised my voice—

“What are you talking about!? Seriously, what are you talking about!? I don't know what you mean!”

“.....What's that..... You didn't fall in love with Haruka?”

“When did I say that!?”

“When you were talking about love in the boy's room—— it seemed like you praised Haruka a lot. With the same enthusiasm as when you talk about Kirino. You also said you weren't interested in me romantically”

“No no no no! Saying something like that.....”

—— I feel a strange affinity with Haruka

—— Even though she's a divine beauty, that doesn't feel like a barrier

—— I can speak to her naturally, I feel like I have to protect her

—— As for romantic feelings, I'm not sure myself

—— I think our relationship is fine as it is—— to be honest

I'm an idiot! I did say that! Of course it would be interpreted that way!

“Ah, no! That's a misunderstanding!”

Gah! Where do I begin!

“Uh, um, first of all? Sure, I think that Haruka is super beautiful, cute, divine, and second only to Kirino in terms of outstanding looks! In addition, I think her personality is bright and fun, she's easy to talk to, and we have good chemistry!”

“.....The more I hear, the less it seems like a misunderstanding”

“Because I'm being honest—— even so, I have no romantic feelings for Haruka. Seriously, from the bottom of my heart, not a even a millimetre”

It's obvious to me that Haruka is not the one I'm interested in.

I don't dare to tell her—— I foolishly thought.

“Why is that? It's not like you don't find her attractive?”

“I don't know! I really don't know myself, but she's not like that!”

“If it's 'not like that' then what is it?”

She looked straight into my eyes and questioned me. This time it was my turn to struggle.

Suddenly it was difficult to talk. I was lost for a response. Because I thought my answer would be important.

“Well, Haruka is..... to me.....”

“Haruka is to you?”

A friend, but I don't think that's the right thing to say.

Not my lover, my little sister—— would be close, but it's something different——

Ah—, uh—, um~~~m!

“.....Older sister, I guess”

Because I was so cornered, I blurted out something crazy.

Perhaps because it was such an unexpected line, Kuroneko stared at me dumbfounded.

“O- older sister? To senpai, Haruka is, something like an older sister..... is that what you mean?”

I groaned..... “I'm sorry, I don't know why I said such a stupid thing myself—— But, well.....what is it..... Certainly she's a special person to me, why don't I fall in love with her, even I think it's strange myself..... wanting to go out with her, to kiss her and go home with her—— I don't feel like that at all. What can I say..... at any rate, she's 'like my little sister but something else'! I can't describe it!”

Honestly, what am I doing.

I don't think I can persuade her like this. I don't feel like I'm helping Kuroneko's misunderstanding.

“Besides, ah—.....”

What am I embarrassed about.

Don't I want to resolve this misunderstanding?

Say it!

“It's not Haruka I'm interested in, it's you”

“.....Heh?”

“Since Kuroneko became my kouhai this spring, we've been able to spend more time together..... I've been getting more and more interested..... I came to this camp because I wanted to support you”

“Wha, wha, wha.....”

Kuroneko was taken aback with surprise. Her face was bright red to the tips of her ears.

I exhaled deeply,

“That reaction..... You hadn't noticed”

“Because..... I'm not.....”

Really yare yare. I mean what I'm saying.

“Your self esteem is too low. Just now, I praised Haruka so much. But..... I think you're more attractive than Haruka!”

Aaa, that's not a good line! I'm so clumsy! It's too embarrassing!

But, I can't help it— because it's all true!

“.....y.....y.....”

Kuroneko's body was trembling, it looked like she was going to cry.

Intermittently, a voice that failed to become words leaked from her mouth.

Finally, a meaning formed,

“.....Y- you're lying”

“I'm not lying!”

“But, at that time.....”

“That..... is..... well.....”

Kuroneko was waiting for my answer with a bright red face, but I shamefully stumbled over my words.

“I am, with you..... I don't want to ruin the precious friendship I have with you! I'm afraid of being rejected! That's why I bluffed that I don't want to advance our relationship!”

Shit!

Why can't I think of a single clever line to say when it's important!

“That's why..... I am..... in short..... if I'm not in love with Haruka..... then somebody else.....”

I worried and worried. In the end, what came out of my mouth was a simple line.

“It's you I want!”

A~~~~~ my face is hot! I'm going to die! I'm going to die of embarrassment!

This, this is..... I—— it's like a clear declaration!

My brain is becoming unable to make normal decisions.

But that's why I gained momentum.

Aa! I already told her absolutely everything!

To put the swirling feelings in my heart into words ——

“BAAH!”

——Just as I was about to, a ridiculous obstacle appeared.

As we were sitting side by side, suddenly, something covered with what looked like a white sheet jumped out in front of us.

“Hyaa!” “Gyaaaaa!”

Kuroneko was so surprised she hugged me as we both screamed loudly.

It might be the first time I've heard her make such a loud noise.

If you saw it in a well-lit room, it must have been a bad ghost costume.

But! If something startles you in the dark, of course you'd be scared——!

Moreover, I was just about to make the confession of a lifetime!?

It's not like I was surprised!

“.....Hah, hah, hah, hah.....”

Kuroneko: “.....Th- that surprised me”

Both me and Kuroneko stiffened while hugging each other.

With trembling hands, I turned the light of my flashlight toward the ghost.

I realised the ghost was just someone wearing a futon sheet, and I gradually regained my composure.

No! I know who it is,

“That voice..... it's Haruka!”

“Correct—♪”

The sheet was lifted, and a mischievous girl's face peeked out.

“Are you kidding me! Of all times, you appear now.....!?”

You~~u!

You want me and Kuroneko to get together, or you want to get in the way, which one is it!

When I seriously expressed my considerable anger, Haruka hurriedly began making excuses.

“That's not it! There's a deeper meaning to this okay?”

“You're making excuses like I do!”

“There really is a real reason! I had no choice but to interrupt you here and now!”

Haruka is raving about the timing being wrong~~~~!

Shit, aren't you saying things that don't make sense!?

You ruined the good atmosphere!

As my anger grew, Kuroneko grabbed my shoulder.

“Um..... Senpai, I'm sure it has something to do with the 'matter’”

“Eh, a- aah..... I see”

As soon as she soothed me, my irritated feelings began to calm down.

Maybe it was necessary for the sake of Haruka's return.

That's what Kuroneko meant by the “matter”.

“Grrr..... If that's the case, so be it”

“Sorry!”

Haruka put her hands together as if she was praying.

Then she glanced at me,

“But Kyouzuke-kun”

Suddenly returning to her initial frivolous attitude, her lips rippled with a broad smile.

“Thanks to the super beautiful, cute and divine Haruka-chan, didn't you have a good time~?”

“Huh?”

For a moment, I was confused and didn't know what she meant.

““—Ah””

At the same time as Kuroneko, I realised that we were still hugging each other. Suddenly my face was red-hot—

“~~~~~”

An inaudible scream echoed through the night at the shrine.

That's how it went.

The test of courage went smoothly after that..... Now, everyone was gathered at the grounds in the night.

As planned, we were going to play with fireworks. The president was handing out handheld fireworks that he had purchased at the candy store. As for me,

“.....What are you gonna do about it. Because of you, things have become awkward between me and Kuroneko again.”

“Th- that's not truee”

I was complaining to Haruka about what had happened earlier.

When I glanced at Kuroneko, who was talking to Sena a small distance away, she turned towards me at exactly the wrong moment—

When our eyes met, she quickly looked away.

I grabbed Haruka by the shoulders and shook her back and forth.

“Look, look, you see that? She's totally avoiding me!”

“T- totally avoiding you”

“It's your fault!”

She stopped me halfway through my confession! Now we're too conscious of each other!

“B- but, that's awkward in a good way? Right?”

“I don't like phrases like 'in a good way'. It sounds like a cop-out”

“Don't sulk!”

“I'm not sulking—”

As I pursed my lips and sulked, Haruka let out an exasperated “*Geez really*”

“You're absolutely sulking..... Ooh..... Ever since I got here, my image of you has been crumbling”

I took issue with the phrase I overheard, and guessed,

“Have you..... as well as Kuroneko, met me before?”

“Well, yeah. The you I know is more like..... Well, I can't tell you, tsu”

She groaned as she stretched her folded arms to her back, showing her armpits.

“Aah— I'm more tired than I expected. I thought this would be easier. Hey, Kyouzuke-kun. I'm sure you're aware but..... don't say anything, just in case”

I nodded at her vague request.

“Got it. It's classified information isn't it”

“Yep yep”

Nhehe – she smiled.

Once again, a strong sense of familiarity swirled in my heart.

A strange feeling, much like with my sister, but a little different.

.....Perhaps, maybe, surely.....

Her true identity is.....

I shook my head to dismiss the thought, when Haruka noticed my expression, she lowered her voice,

“At any rate, you——”

We stared at each other, and I asked bluntly,

“What is it?”

“You think of me as your onee-chan, right?”

She heard it!

“Forget that! I just couldn't think of any other appropriate way to say it!”

“Fuhehe, Kyouzuke-kun, the super sis-con, is my little brother.....”

As if fantasizing about the scene, Haruka looked up at the night sky with distant eyes, and after pondering for a while,

“Ooh..... My proclivities are becoming distorted because of you, will you take responsibility?”

I don't know what you're talking about!

When I turned the other way, Haruka cackled with laughter,

“Well, I'm off to perform my final duty”

She lightly waved one hand as she walked away.

The club members were haphazardly scattered around the grounds, preparing handheld fireworks. Sena and Kuroneko were bringing burning candles to everyone.

Meanwhile, Haruka approached Kuroneko to talk to her about something, and before long.....

“W- wait a minute.....”

She forcibly pulled a bewildered Kuroneko along.

Haruka pushed Kuroneko in front of me,

“Yes! Kyousuke-kun, I brought Kuroneko-chan!”

“A bit forceful. But well done”

After all, if you want to manage an awkward situation, it's best to talk properly in a position where you can't escape.

“.....”

“.....”

I faced Kuroneko head on, and we stared at each other.

Kuroneko's face remained in a bright red state.

I'm sure my face looked similar.

I felt embarrassed, awkward, and incredibly ashamed.

I'm filled with the desire to escape right now.

But! I will endure it!

I spoke in a light voice, as if my earlier attempted confession had never happened,

“Let's do fireworks together”

“.....Mm”

A little nod.

Then once again we fell silent.

The same, but slightly different, silence.

Among the noisy bustle, only around us it was quiet.

That's not the case, but it felt that way.

“Hey you two, mind if I join you”

Throwing open the doors of our silence, Haruka interrupted.

“Sure, here's some fireworks. There's plenty of them——”

“..... You”

Kuroneko turned to Haruka, exasperated with narrowed eyes,

“What the heck is up with this fine tuning the distance between us? Is this also related to the 'matter'?”

“It was when I scared you. Ah, but, it's different now isn't it?”

“Hey”

When I curtly called her out, Haruka childishly stuck out her tongue.

A close friend behaving like a spoiled child. Then suddenly, with a painful voice,

“Because this is the last chance, I wanted to make some memories with you guys”

“Right..... soon, the camp will be over”

Kuroneko couldn't hide the loneliness that filled her voice.

The precious friend she'd made, normally it would be impossible for her to get so close to somebody so quickly.

But farewell is approaching.

I also had the same feeling.

When these noisy times are gone, we'll miss them.

That's something we all knew very well.

“Come to think of it, earlier you said something about your 'final duty' ——does that mean”

“Yeah, I've done all I need to do in the past. All the 'distortions' that were created because of me have been fixed. With this, everything will be okay. I just need to wait for the right moment”

“.....I see”

What was the “distortion” created by Haruka coming to the past?

She said that she'd done all she needs to do, but what she's been doing on this island, after all——

I didn't dare ask.

I know better than that.

You're just trying to get along with us for the last time.

If I were in her position, I'm sure I would do the same.

Even though I knew it could jeopardise her return, I wanted to get to know her better, to ask her—

But, it's okay, I won't be a nuisance.

This is a precious opportunity. Let's play together until the end.

“Honestly..... You took so many fireworks”

“.....Fufu. Which one should we start with?”

“This is the first time I've seen these kind of fireworks! I wonder which one is better~♪”

Each of us took our favourite fireworks and lit them on the candle.

The tips of the handheld fireworks flared up and bloomed into sparkles.

The erupting flames illuminated the figures of the girls.

Black, and white. Contrasting clothes, contrasting appearances.

But, I felt that they were very similar.

Side by side like this, they look like real sisters.

“.....I wonder how onee-chan is doing”

Like falling drops of rain—

Haruka murmured a few words.

Now that she's figured out how to get home safely, she must be worried about what happened to her sister.

“Does your onee-chan look like Kuroneko in appearance?”

I thought about it a little..... and asked such a question. Before, she was talking about hobbies and behavior similar to Kuroneko, so it's not a particularly unnatural question.

“Eh? Onee-chan and Kuroneko-chan? Hm—, I wonder.....”

Haruka, who had been watching the Catherine wheel in her hand curiously, pondered for a while at my question.

Meanwhile, Kuroneko turned to me with a wry smile,

“.....What kind of question is that”

“It's okay, it's no big deal.Aren't you curious?”

“.....Well, I guess so”

We were awkward until just a moment ago, but I noticed, the atmosphere had become strangely relaxed.

I don't need to say why, nor should I.

If I said anything, I felt that it may change the future.

As I shook my head trying to forget about it, Haruka's thoughts seemed to come together. She spoke.

“If she kept her mouth shut and stayed silent, I think there's a similarity”

Me: “They don't look alike when she opens her mouth?”

Kuroneko: “Is she a talkative person?”

“She's a hundred times more noisy than Kuroneko-chan. I mean, onee-chan is——

In response to the additional question, Haruka raised her hands to the sides of her face with an intimidating gesture.

“Like 'rawwr—’”⁶⁶

“What's up with that”

“Hmm..... Kuroneko-chan is like a kuroneko-chan—— isn't she?”⁶⁷

“She is”

Black, small, cute, capricious, noble, very difficult to get close to.

“Right? On the other hand, onee-chan is like a little stray.....She's ferocious..... If you let her loose in a room, she'd go wild and make a mess”

“.....Is she a scary person?”

“She's an annoying person!”

A quick response! It's like she immediately replied with her completely true feelings.

“She's rough and quick to violence, too strong to beat in a fight, so selfish *only* towards me, and doesn't feel bad about getting in trouble, it's sooo tiresome!”

She was fuming with anger.

66 Gao— onomatopoeia for a wild animal noise

67 I think the implication here is “Kuroneko is like a black cat”. I assume if you're reading this novel you probably know that's what Kuroneko means

I feel sorry for Haruka, but it's getting interesting to listen to——

I whispered to Kuroneko,

“.....Haruka sure gets super lively when she's complaining about her big sister”

“.....Just like when a certain someone is complaining about their little sister”

“.....”

I fell silent with a sour face.

Kuroneko turned to Haruka,

“My impression of your onee-san has changed a lot. It's surprising that she has hobbies and tastes similar to mine, but also a high fighting ability”

Although she *could have been more direct*, she dared to ask in a roundabout way.

Haruka replied with a wry smile,

“When onee-chan was little, she started learning karate to get revenge on a bully. Now she's a black belt”

“She's a disgrace to martial artists”

Someone with chuunibyou and a high fighting ability, that's really problematic.

What kind of parenting is this..... I had mixed feelings.

Haruka spoke with a bored expression,

“I really wish she would stop tyrannising her little sister with her black belt power. With siblings who are the same sex and close in age, after all, the stronger one tends to become a tyrant. I'm not onee-chan's slave, geez”

“It's the same for siblings of the opposite sex. The stronger one becomes a tyrant and oppresses the other. In the middle of the night, they'll come into your room without permission and wake you with a slap. Make you buy erogé at midnight and call it life counselling. It's seriously not right. I'm not my sister's slave”

“.....That sounds like your horrible personal experience”

“.....This is the first time I've lost in a complaint competition”

Rejoice Kirino. Your deeds are unbeatable in a complaint competition.

Only Akagi, who has Sena as a sister, could compete, but he never complains about his sister, so there's essentially no competition.

The conversations we have are only about little sister this, little sister that.

Even if we move to a different topic, before long we return to talking about our families.

Before I knew it, the fireworks we had were almost all burned out.....

We lit the last ones.

Sparklers.

Three people crouched in a circle.

This way, we protect the modest lights from the night breeze.

“.....”

“.....”

“.....”

We stared in silence at the last fireworks.

They sputtered and hissed..... From the beads that burned in the center, small sparks burst and disappeared.

Little by little, the handles burned and got shorter.

Once these falling stars fell, we'd be done for the night.

The long day was over, and our farewell to Haruka grew one step closer.

As if our feelings had been conveyed, the falling stars never fell.

It was surely the longest period of time since I came to this island.

“Hey, Kyouzuke-kun, Kuroneko-chan. Before I go home”

While staring transfixed at her sparkler, Haruka muttered a few words,

“.....I need life counselling”

Was there a reason she chose that line? Was it a coincidence?

Was it because I included those words in my complaints earlier?

It didn't matter which.

We glanced at each other for a moment.

“.....Kuku” “.....Haha”

We laughed and nodded. It was strangely funny.

Of course, Haruka was annoyed by our attitude, and puffed out her cheeks adorably.

“You two, I’m being serious here, what are you laughing about”

Kuroneko: “Sorry…… Fufu, but…… I don’t know what to say”

Me: “It’s just a little nostalgic— Well, don’t worry about it”

“It’s okay. So— my counselling, will you help me?”

The answer was obvious, naturally.

Kuroneko: “Of course”

Me: “Leave it to us”

Our voices together, we smiled.

“……Th- thank you”

Haruka tilted her head at our overly enthusiastic attitude, but soon began to speak in little drops.

“My worries are…… as you might have guessed, about onee-chan”

Kuroneko nodded and urged her to continue with a gesture.

“For a long time, I haven’t understood— what that person is thinking. In the past, we used to get along well. Now, our relationship keeps getting worse…… or rather…… I just can’t keep up with her”

This time I urged her onwards.⁶⁸

“Since we were little kids, she’s been an unreasonable, domineering, selfish person, but she’s been especially awful recently. It’s onee-chan that started it. Why is she so mean……”

She sighed. Sparks hissed and twinkled in Haruka’s hand where she crouched.

“……Sorry, for suddenly saying this kind of thing. You’ve never met onee-chan, you don’t know what we’re like usually, so asking for counselling…… must be bothersome”

Nhehe, she laughed weakly and continued,

“I know that but…… even so…… I really wanted your advice”

Why is that.

I didn’t ask.

68 Aizuchi wo utsu – literally “to hit with mutual hammers” refers to the *back-channel* - interjections to show that you are paying attention to the speaker. The Japanese do this *a lot* during conversation, it’s considered rude not to

It's classified information, probably.

But, I knew I had to do my best to answer.

Surely, it's something that only “present us” can discuss.

“Certainly, you're right”

Kuroneko said with a gentle voice.

“We've never met your onee-san. We've heard a lot of your complaints about your onee-san..... which means, we've only heard one side of the story. When resolving a sisterly quarrel, if you don't hear both sides, you can't mediate”

As expected of the eldest daughter. She's right.

I was impressed, but Haruka seemed annoyed.

“.....Are you trying to tell me that I'm being biased with my story?”

“That's not the case. I also have two little sisters. The elder sister is in the fifth grade of elementary school. The younger sister is a first grader. When sisters like that have a quarrel..... often their stories don't match up”

.....Hinata-chan really has quarrels with a first grader.

“In that case, it's not that one of them is lying..... a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the other's behavior..... sometimes quarrels start because they brush past each other like this”

Of course, there are many cases where the older sister is to blame, Kuroneko added a punchline.

Wow..... what a bad onee-chan.....

I only talked to her on the phone, but she seemed like a good-natured person.

Haruka looked down, thought for a moment, and then looked up.

“Maybe we're sisters who brush past each other too. Is that what you're saying Kuroneko-chan?”

“I don't know, maybe. As you said before, I've never met your onee-san”

“.....Then, I just don't know”

“Your onee-san is a lot like me isn't she? Then, I can imagine—— if you were my little sister close to my age”

“_____”

As Haruka's eyes widened, Kuroneko closed hers,

“If you were my little sister, and we lived under the same roof the whole time.....”

She spoke in a self-deprecating tone.

“I'm sure I'd be too envious, I don't think we could get along well”

“.....Envious? Kuroneko-chan—— of me?”

“That's right. You're an extremely superior little sister. A very very..... wonderful woman.⁶⁹ Cheerful, cute, full of various talents, always positive, overflowing with vitality, can make friends with anyone right away—— the complete opposite of me. You happen to have everything I could wish for, right from the start. *If I had someone like that right beside me as a little sister.* I couldn't stay calm at all”

“.....Is that true?”

“Yeah. In fact, you've left my pride in tatters after just a few days—— and we're not even sisters. If it was before I met that woman, I would have been so depressed I would never recover”

“I understand. Having a 'perfect superwoman little sister' is so annoying”

As someone who has been dented by the same opponent, I can only sympathise.

While I was reminded of a certain someone's face, a *Kuu* rang in Kuroneko's throat.

“On the other hand, Haruka, what about your onee-san? She's acting *conceited* towards her little sister right? As if to say 'I'm better than you', she's always pushing you around and abusing her power?”

“——I respect that”

Kuroneko earnestly spat out her words.

“I don't think I could do that. ——Is she similar to me? Fu, is that a joke? She's way more awesome than me. Because to a little sister that's superior to her, she's able to *bluff being a strong older sister*”

“.....”

Haruka, while listening to Kuroneko's story, had been dumbfounded since a while ago.

Like she heard something that was too unexpected—— that kind of face.

Kuroneko continued further,

“You said your onee-san was 'learning karate for revenge”

“Y- yeah”

69 Josai josei – a bit of word play. Josai can mean tactful, shrewd, clever and affable

“Was she able to get her revenge?”

Haruka made a face like *why would you ask that?*

“Um, she wasn't able to. I mean, she didn't need to. I was able to talk to the bully properly and make friends with them”

She said flatly.

Kuroneko furrowed her brow with a very bitter face.

“I don't understand, why are you meddling in your elder sister's problems?”

“Both of us sisters were being bullied. With onee-chan's method, it would take too long to solve the problem, and if it's solved with violence, it would cause more trouble. —That's why I”

“There it is!”

Swish! Even though Haruka was half way through her sentence, Kuroneko thrust a finger at her face.

Wh- what's up with Kuroneko, suddenly shouting tonight.

“Th- there what is?”

Haruka blinked with confusion. Kuroneko continued in a frustrated manner,

“I can say with certainty, when you solved the bullying problem, your onee-san got angry”

“Yes! You figured it out! My baka sister got so angry, and we got in a fight..... Aah! I'm getting annoyed just remembering it! Just a simple 'thank you'..... that's..... all I wanted! Shit, you don't punch a maiden in the face!”

“You're both at fault baka”

“Ouch!”

With a thump, Kuroneko dropped her knuckles on Haruka. Haruka covered her head with both hands,

“Why!?”

“Hmm, the matter of your counselling was 'I don't know what my big sister is thinking'. I think the other party feels exactly the same way. 'I don't know what my little sister is thinking' 'She's annoying' 'It's frustrating' 'Why doesn't she understand'— etc.”

“E- eeh~?”

“Your actions were very sensible, rational, and reasonable. It's hard to believe this story is from your childhood. —But, you made a mistake”

“.....What should I have done? ”

Haruka asked like a scolded child, and Kuroneko answered with blunt confidence.

“If 'the action you actually took' was the lower plan, the middle plan was 'let your sister take revenge'. This way, big sister could protect little sister with her own strength, which would have greatly satisfied her self-esteem. This might have left room in her heart to become a kind big sister to her little sister”⁷⁰

“Ugu..... There's a lot of things I want to say but..... What's the upper plan?”

“It's 'Both sisters take revenge together’”

She's starting to say dangerous things.

“If you had done that back then, I'm sure you could have become close sisters”

“Are you seriously saying that!?”

“Of course”

Kuroneko nodded several times with a serious face.

“H- hey Kuroneko. Is that the right answer to your super serious life counselling?”

“Ara, senpai. What's the problem?”

“No, because.....”

In the story of Pang Tong, the upper plan was not necessarily the most agreeable strategy, but the most radical strategy. In that sense, the upper plan might be the best plan, but,

“Isn't your advice too extreme?”

“If I were her sister, that's what I would want”

Honestly, she won't yield her theory at all. Haruka piped up,

“Wait, wait wait wait..... I'm not convinced! A- after all, revenge or something like that just seems empty!”

Kuroneko sighed a long and heavy sigh.

“Are you stupid, it's so refreshing. You can put an end to it and move one. Get the better of those awful people, make them cry, look down and laugh at them— in this world, there's nothing more thrilling than that!”

“.....”

Haruka was lost for words and fell silent.

70 Pang Tong was a military advisor to Lui Bei, a warlord in ancient China. He famously gave Lui Bei three options for attacking Yi Province: An upper, middle and lower plan

Kuroneko you..... you..... even when you quarrel with Kirino, you don't speak like that.

Just how strongly do you want to emphasize your point.

“Please listen carefully—— it's a lie that revenge doesn't yield anything. Revenge yields 'fun'”

Kuroneko turned one palm upwards in a gesture like a demon king.

“With revenge themed stories, you can get so absorbed in just having a simulated experience, there's no way it's not fun to get revenge yourself. When you're planning how to get your revenge, it's already fun to have rivalry every day. It's even more refreshing and fun when you're executing it. After that revenge, you can say 'Aah that felt good' and move on fully satisfied. I'm sure your onee-san wanted to do that—— any yet she was shut down by her little sister. Moreover, you acted like she should be grateful”

“That's a serious blow. For an older sister”

She finished speaking in one breath, and took a long breath in.

I spoke to Kuroneko with a look of admiration,

“You..... How can you trace so much of that shitty girl's dangerous thoughts”

“Don't call onee-chan a shitty girl!”

“If the current theory is correct, you're right, it's not really justified. She's just a kid with a warped personality”

It's entirely bad parenting. You can't spoil these kind of shitty kids.

If it were me, I'd definitely be strict. I'm sure of that. I swear.

“Ara, senpai, are you trying to say my personality is warped too?”

“Yeah. Come to think of it that's right, I just remembered”

Recently, only Kuroneko's good side has stood out, so I forgot.

I had romance on the brain, became deluded with love.⁷¹

Kuroneko is a great friend, someone who sacrifices herself for her family, always worrying, kind, admirable, considerate—— be that as it may.

She's not an especially good person. By anyone's standards, her personality is warped.

She's the kind of person who's motivated by revenge against readers, players and the world, and

71 Iroboke – literally “colour blurred” is slang for someone who's obsessed with sex, dirty thoughts or mad with desire

expresses it in her creations. The kind of person who yells out of envy and deep resentment.

“H- hey! Kyouzuke-kun!?”

When Haruka witnessed me suddenly saying rude things, she got unreasonably upset.

Kukuku..... Kuroneko herself was in good humour,

“Please don't forget. This is me”

“Roger”

With a bump, our fists lightly touched. Haruka looked at us like she couldn't comprehend.

“That's why..... for sisterly quarrels, mutual understanding and compromise are essential. Well, that's all the advice I have..... Is there anything from senpai?”

“Let's see.....”

I thought for a moment,

“Just to confirm, Haruka, you want to make up with your older sister— don't you? That's why you asked for counselling?”

I asked.

“Of course”

The answer was immediate. Seeing her reaction, I spoke with confidence.

“Then, you'll be fine. You'll definitely be able to make up with her”

“.....How can you be sure? Kyouzuke-kun, you've never met onee-chan”

“Because, from what you've said about your sister, I can tell that you both care about each other a lot. You want to make up..... honestly, I think you're already very close”

“We're not close at all! We hate each other!”

“But, you want to get along right?”

“That's..... true, but..... right now we don't get along, right now I hate onee-chan”

“Then, as I thought, it's much better”

“Eh?”

“We were way worse”

Once upon a time—

There was a brother and sister who didn't get along.

“Me an my sister had a really bad relationship. Even though we lived in the same house, we didn't talk, we didn't make eye contact..... we hated each other so much, I thought it would be good if that shitty person died——..... Nothing could be done about it. I didn't even think about reconciliation. I thought it would be like that for the rest of my life, so I gave up”

“——Even though we were like that, various things happened..... and now, things are a just little bit better”

That's why you guys will be fine.

If we were able to do it, there's no reason why you couldn't do it.

Judging from my personal experience, you get my stamp of approval.

“Well, I still doubt I'll be able to make up with her, I still hate her, I'm glad she's gone, I hope she never comes back”

“That's no good!”

“But, I hope she's doing okay, I guess”

I spoke from the bottom of my heart. Otherwise, it won't be transmitted.

“Every time I sneeze, I'm worried that she might catch a cold, every time I eat, I'm worried if she's eating properly, every time I pass by her room, I wish she'd come home quickly, it's boring without her”

“Senpai? Aren't there some contradictory statements mixed in there?”

“That's right. But, it's all true. We hate each other, I'm worried about her, I want her to disappear, and I miss her. That's how we are. That's how brothers and sisters are. Aren't two sisters the same?”

I'm sorry for the incomprehensible advice.

When I apologized, Haruka shook her head,

“I see..... It's okay to love someone you hate”

She murmured.

“That's nice, that way of thinking”

“Right?”

Well, I don't really love my sister but,

“You're returning home tomorrow—— on the night of the festival?”

“Maybe. If things go the way I think they will, I think so”

I remember she said something about an 'incident' happening during this camp.

It's very important to Haruka that it doesn't change.

After the outcome is revealed, she can go home—— right.

“Well, we can play until then”

“Yeah!”

Haruka replied cheerfully. Kuroneko watched the situation with a smile,

“At the festival, there'll be a fireworks display right? How about the three of us go to watch it”

“Oh, that would be good. I heard there will also be food stalls”

Me and Kuroneko were excited, but Haruka only stared blankly,

“.....Is that okay? I'm not intruding?”

“How would you be intruding. Huh?”

“Yeah..... Now that we feel this way, that means..... it shouldn't affect your return. Because our time together is precious, let's be together until the last minute”

Kuroneko's words carried many feelings. Nobody, even in my own thoughts, wasn't touched at the core.

To the dear friend we met on this island, farewell is approaching——

That's the way it is. So that's what we're going to do.

“I see. Then, if you insist”

Hehe, she laughed,

“I'm looking forward to tomorrow”

And so we stared at the fireworks forever.

It was a long, long time.

For days, for years..... it felt like we watched.

Then, finally, the falling stars fell.

Three sparklers came to an end at the same time.

All too soon, they fell to the ground.

With handheld fireworks, it's fun while you have them, but when they end, you feel sad.

Once upon a time, as a child..... when we had fireworks with my family, I remember my sister crying.

I looked up.

There was Kuroneko's face,

“It's over huh”

“Yeah”

“Let's tidy up”

“Sure”

Contrary to our words, both me and Kuroneko remained crouched and motionless.

A burnt out sparkler fell next to us.

The two of us stared, alone, until the president came to call us.



— I feel like I've forgotten something very important.

After dawn broke, even in the morning, that feeling didn't go away, it only grew stronger.

The 'Hiten Festival' is not a big festival that attracts tourists, but, partly because they helped, the club members were unreasonably excited.

Preparing for the festival, researching for the game, various other work—

After finishing everything that had to be done at the camp, everyone was excited to enjoy this extraordinary time, for the time we had left.

Unlike me, they didn't seem to be in state of unsettling haziness.

Akagi, who was expected to be strong, was chosen to carry the portable shrine as special treatment.

As her brother paraded around the town grunting and shouting, Sena danced ecstatically and took photos— with the digital camera that she stole from me!

In the evening, me and Kuroneko went around the food stalls that were lined up along the shopping district.

Today, the same as the first day, she's wearing her pure white one-piece dress.

It's been a few days since I last saw it, she looks so good I can't look at her directly.

Going to a festival with the person I'm interested in— or something like that.

A situation where my chest is about to burst.

We bought and ate food from the stalls, Kuroneko did spectacularly at the ring toss and target shooting, and on the verge of getting lost in the crowd, we held hands—

It's a perfect date. There's no excuse.

It was super super super super super fun—— but.

“Hey, senpai..... I feel like we've..... forgotten something”

“That's a coincidence. I've been feeling like that too”

A prickling feeling like needles in my chest just won't disappear.

Suddenly, I stopped and looked back.

I wondered from where on the island these crowds had come from, they filled the street.

.....Who's face am I looking for now?

I don't know.

“Senpai?”

“Hey, at this camp..... what were we investigating?”

Even though I asked an obvious question, Kuroneko answered without a hint of hesitation on her face.

“For research, we've been investigating 'island folklore'. Like 'taken by spirits', 'Hiten-sama', the origins of 'Inumaki Shrine'..... various things”

“Ah, that's right. I can't remember— but, in some places, isn't there something missing?”

“Eh?”

“We should have finished all the research we were planning to do. And yet, when I try to remember things chronologically, aren't there some gaps? Like, for example— the evening of the first day. We went out to take pictures, but there are no photos on my digital camera from the first day. The photos I was supposed to take on the first day were taken on another day— Why?”

“That's—..... I wonder why..... I really can't remember”

“Me too. And there are a number of similar omissions.I wonder what it is. Maybe I should just accept that it's my imagination— but”

I feel like it was something important, but I just can't remember.

Slightly depressed, I grabbed my chest.

“Man I feel super hazy. What should I do..... It's like when I hit a high hurdle in an eroge that Kirino gave me, in the end I stop playing it and forget about it, and a week goes by”

“That's a horrible analogy, senpai”

She gave me a cold look.

“But, I know how you feel”

“I don't feel like watching fireworks like this”

I can't even get into the mood to continue where we left off yesterday.

“Yeah”

That's why, I'm really sorry but..... I can't.

“Well then, let's not bother with the fireworks—”

—Eeeeh! Wait a minute! That's no good!

I felt like I heard such a voice.

“.....Kuroneko, did you say something just now?”

“No, nothing. Is something wrong, senpai?”

“No.....”

I felt someone's gaze on the nape of my neck and looked back again. Even if I do that, the scene would not change. See, the crowd of people is still there——

It wasn't.

In the shopping district lined with stalls, there was not a single person. Even the cries of noisy cicadas had disappeared.

Me and Kuroneko looked on speechless and wide eyed.

Even though I was at the the highest level of confusion, my body moved naturally.

As if my whole body knew what to do, but not my head.

Go straight down the road where the people have disappeared. Go through the shopping district and head south.

A strong sense of deja vu was trying to shake up my sunken memories.

Next to the soba shop, there was an old signboard.

——Yes, turn this corner.

In a hurry, we went faster and faster. When Kuroneko was out of breath and slowed down, I reached for her hand.

It felt soft.

I took her hand and led her along the promenade, and up the stone steps.

We passed under the simple torii gate.

An unpleasant feeling like static electricity popped on my neck.

There were no decorated grounds.

A small shrine stood alone.

And——

“Hey, Kyouzuke-kun, Kuroneko-chan”

We meet again.

The white girl shyly raised one hand.

“Come on you guys..... We were totally going to see the fireworks, right? Why are you trying to do something different? It's not what we planned—”

“Baka, it's because you suddenly disappeared”

She used the same tone as when she scolds Kirino.

“That's right, we can't concentrate on the fireworks when we're worried about you”

Me too, as if I was rebuking my sister,

“Didn't we have an agreement?”

“Hmph—..... I didn't mean to break our agreement. But, suddenly it became like this..... More or less, I've been with you the whole time”

But, we just couldn't see her.

.....She said she would return home on the night of the festival.

“.....Will you make it home safely?”

“Yes, soon. I'm sure. This time, it's really goodbye”

Her pure white appearance had never seemed so weak.

Almost like a mist that was about to disappear.

“I see..... It will be lonely. Even though I've made so many precious friends”

“Thank you. But, I'll see you again. As long as Kyouzuke-kun does his best”

“Hey hey, what's that supposed to mean?”

“Something like this okay?”

She poked my nose with her finger.

Fuhehe- she laughed.

Honestly..... If you notice it, she's too similar.

Not to anyone. She doesn't look like any one individual.

However..... Little by little, similar to people I know.

In some ways, similar to Hinata-chan.

In some ways, similar to Kirino.

In some ways, similar to Kuroneko.

In some ways, similar to me—— this girl from the future.

That girl, until the end, she never told us her real name.

Until the end, me and Kuroneko never asked her.

The mysterious friend we met on an island.

That's fine.

I spoke softly to the friend we were about to part with.

“I know. Don't worry”

“Will you really be okay~? This Kyouzuke-kun is rather unreliable~”

“Shut up and go home already!”

I shooed her away with my hand.

“And, talk to your big sister properly”

“You're not going to tell me to make up with her——?”

“Because it's a line that annoyed me when it was said to me. ——You can do it if you want to”

“Hm, I understand. I'll do it”

“Yeah, do it”

That's all there is to say.

Kuroneko timidly stepped out in front of me.

“.....This is hard”

“Kuroneko-chan?”

“At times like this..... I don't know..... what to say”

Ah—..... ah—..... her voice became nasally.

It's only been half a year since she suddenly said farewell to her best friend.

She's a big hearted person..... well, this is what happens.

“Don't cry, Kuroneko-chan”

The white girl gently stroked Kuroneko's head.

Like a big sister does to her little sister.

“You praised me, but I'm not actually such a great person. I can't think of a way say goodbye in a cool way or stop you from crying”

“.....We'll forget about you won't we”

“Yeah..... This time, I'll disappear without causing any discomfort, and you'll never remember me again”

We already knew that.

Until recently, we had holes in our memories here and there.

But, when it was put into words again, like *I see*, it became clear, and I was convinced.

The white girl hugged Kuroneko lovingly.

“You saw the articles in the library. I'm sure, like those girls, I'll forget everything when I wake up in the future. I'll wake up next to a big sister I don't get along with, and we'll fight as usual”

The important advice you gave me will be lost.

My memories and experiences of the week will all rewind and disappear.

“Nothing can be brought back to the future. I guess that's how it is.In the end, I didn't accomplish anything while I was here. Correct the distortion, as it was originally. That's why I can go home.”

As she made her personal report, she couldn't stop the girl in her arms from crying.

It just made it harder to say goodbye. She was on the verge of crying herself.

But,

“You're right”

Kuroneko stopped crying on her own. She released her body, and looked closely at the face of the white girl.

“Your time travel didn't mean anything. My memories of you will disappear without a trace, the time spent with you, conversations with you, they have no effect on my future. From now, for the rest of my life, I won't remember any of it”

“.....That's right”

“So what?”

In her nasally voice, she put on a brave front.

“I had a lot of fun this week. How about you?”

“I had fun! So much! So much!”

“Then, that's fine. You thought the same way, that's why you tried so hard to enjoy yourself, right?”

She's smarter than us, she must have been aware of it for a long time.

And yet, more than anyone else, she was doing her best to enjoy these disappearing days.

“Yeah.....!”

“We get along well. That's also how I feel right now”

They both came to the same conclusion.

Let's enjoy these meaningless days that will eventually disappear.

“Kuroneko-chan”

“What is it?”

“It's too late now but..... in another time..... will you be my friend?”

“That's fine. I'll remove a certain traitor and award you the status of my second best friend”

“What's that..... you won't give me first place?”

“I'm sorry. As much as I owe you, first place is immovable”

“Aha, well, I'll settle for second place. Well, it's almost time”

“Yes, then, goodbye for today”

They took a step back from each other. From now, it's a distance that will never be closed.

And yet, we readily exchange our final words.

“Yeah, Kuroneko-chan, Kyouzuke-kun. Thank you for everything”

“Don't catch a cold”

“Take care”

“Okaay. Well, see you”

Bang, the fireworks were in full bloom.

For a moment, my eyes were stolen by the brilliant flower.⁷²

⁷² The Japanese word for firework literally translates to “fire flower”

—————Let's see, what were we doing

In the deserted grounds, we were watching the fireworks side by side.

That's right. I had promised Kuroneko that we would go see the fireworks.

The reason why my memory of before and after is not clear, is probably because I'm at my limit.

I gently looked next to me, Kuroneko was looking up at the night sky.

Perhaps she was captivated by the fireworks, her irises were pale as if she was a goddess.

Her appearance was so beautiful that I hesitated.

Ah, shit.

Even though I'd been rehearsing in my head so eagerly, everything was blown away.

It's always like this.

In the end, I can only act haphazardly.

“—Senpai”

“Y- yeah..... what's up?”

While I was trying to measure my timing, the other one spoke up.

She barely replied, keeping her eyes on the night sky.

“This camp, was fun”

She muttered a few words.

“Yeah”

This time, the reply came back smoothly.

“I'm glad I came”

“Well, that's good. Thanks to your family”

“My father, wants to meet you”

“.....Seriously?”

Whoa whoa, to keep me in check?

I absolutely don't want to meet the father of the girl I'm interested in.

“Hey, senpai..... I have something important to tell you..... will you listen?”

“No”

Kuroneko finally looked at my face.

I hesitated for a moment.

—Hey, Kyouusuke-kun. You'll do your best, right?

I felt like someone was pushing my back.

“I also have something to tell you. Listen first”

“Eh—”

Kuroneko looked quite surprised.

The divine atmosphere disappeared, and she trembled in a panic.

I threw words at her that would be different from what she imagined.

“I had a dream”

“.....What was it?”

“A dream I was watching fireworks with you somewhere other than here.

A dream I was teaching you to swim, somewhere other than here.

A dream where you had 'something important to tell me', somewhere other than here.

I don't remember much about it though. All that remains is a feeling of regret. That's why I thought I'd tell you”

“I love you. Please go out with me”



“.....My..... personality is warped right?”

“I know. That's how I like it”

“I'm gloomy and reticent..... being with me, might be boring”

“For the last six months, we've been together constantly. If this could last a lifetime, it would be amazing”

Dangerous, this is becoming like a marriage proposal! What a mistake. This is really heavy.....!

“Ah—..... Can I hear your answer?”

When I asked, tears overflowed from her eyes.

And then,

“.....Yes. Yoroshiku-onegaishimasu, senpai”

She smiled happily.

Epilogue

A long time has passed since then.

I came to this island again.

I really missed it.

That night in the quiet grounds, we stood side by side looking up at the fireworks and confessed.

It's an old story. As you might expect, most of my memories are hazy, but I can remember my wife's face when she accepted my confession as if it were yesterday.

Every time I do, I fall in love all over again.

Our family is staying at a guest house with a very similar atmosphere to the Miura-inn.

The large Japanese-style room reminds me of the room I stayed in with the games club guys.

It was my wife's suggestion that we should fully enjoy the nostalgia of our youth.

I leaned my weight heavily on the back of the rocking chair.

Then I spoke face to face with my wife— Ruri Kousaka.

“How long are they going to play for? It's getting dark already”

“They've gone to investigate the 'taken by spirits' legend”

She replied quietly, she's even more beautiful than when she was a girl.

Her hair still long and black, her skin still pure white, a bewitching charm surrounds her.

A beauty to topple a nation.⁷³ To say that, even taking into account that I'm in deeply love with my wife, is not an exaggeration.

Ruri was sitting on a chair with a framed picture in her lap.

It looks like it was cut from a page of a plain sketchbook, even though it's a picture, there is nothing drawn on it. It's a completely blank sheet of paper.

At that camp, before we knew it, it had gotten mixed up in Ruri's luggage— seemingly.

For some reason, Ruri and I treated this unfamiliar item like it was an important treasure.

To the extent that we would bring it with us on a trip like this.

Well, that camp was really special for us, it was the reason we started dating, so perhaps it feels important because it's an 'article of fate'.

“Rino seemed very enthusiastic, maybe they really did get 'taken by spirits”

73 “keikoku no bijo” - A phrase that originated in ancient Chinese poetry- so beautiful as to cause a nations collapse

“Hey hey, I'm a bit worried about the kids— Should we go and look for them?”

“They'll be fine, Yuri is with them”

“.....That's true. If Yuri is there, they'll be fine”

Picturing the face of my reliable second daughter, I feel at ease.

But then, picturing the face of my rash eldest daughter, I start to worry.

“.....Honestly”

“Fufu..... It's been a long time since we've been alone together like this”

“..... You're right. Thinking about it, it's not so bad”

Just when I thought the twins were getting bigger and less of a handful..... my firstborn son started his rebellious phase, then my fourth child was born, so we didn't have much time to relax.

“I'm sure the kids are taking care of themselves, in their own way”

“No no, if they could take care of themselves, they wouldn't have come on this married couple's private trip in the first place”

“That's true.Ara, as you say that, the expedition has returned”

The pitter-patter of noisy footsteps was approaching.

Eventually, the sliding door opened and the two girls burst into the room.

“Otou-san, okaa-san, we're back—!”

Yuri Kousaka.⁷⁴ A girl dressed in a refreshing blouse, she exuded a cheerful charm and good development that was reminiscent of Kirino when she was younger.

Academic excellence, good looks, a good personality and many friends, she's a perfect superwoman.

An ultra-grade beautiful girl that only appears once in a hundred million years, my proud second daughter.

On the other hand, the gothic lolita girl who came in without any greeting ran straight towards me,

“Kyouzuke! Kyouzuke! Please listen to me!”

She hugged me as hard as she could. Like a carnivore of the cat family with her jagged teeth exposed, jumping at her prey.

“Hey hey, I keep telling you to call me otou-san— what is it Rino. It looks like you're having a lot of fun”

74 The Yu in Yuri is the kanji that Haruka used to spell her name (I imagine you've figured this out by now)

“Ffu! Kukuku! Be amazed..... I finally ascended to godhood!”

“I see I see, Rino is amazing!”

What is she talking about? I cocked my neck while stroking my daughter's head. Rino closed her eyes tightly and I left her to be happy.

This painful but cutest creature in the universe is Rino Kousaka.

Also known as the third generation Kuroneko.

.....Who was the second generation? The person in question would rather forget their dark past, so I won't tell you.⁷⁵

But, returning to the story of the third generation, Rino, the eldest daughter of my family, looks exactly like Kuroneko when I first met her. The only difference is—

Her words and actions are even more dangerous, her motor skills are outstanding, her legs are absurdly fast, and her big mouth is always laughing and smiling. She also is a bit too much of a father-con, and so on.

“Ffufu! Please praise me more, Kyouzuke!”

Rino thrust her forehead and rubbed it against my chest like a drill.

“Yeah! I'll praise you as much as you like!”

I confess. This eldest daughter of mine, I can't help but adore her.

I give her endless spending money. I spoil her endlessly.

And every time—

“Baka parent and child over there, that's enough”

“Otou-san, you spoil Ri-nee too much”

I was scolded by my wife and and second daughter.

“I can't help it..... it's not my fault my daughters are so cute.....”

“Eeh—? But I don't remember being spoiled lately?”

“Oh, can you come and hug me too?”

“No way. Otou-san, you're gross—”

“.....”

75 The answer is in the Ore no Kouhai manga, and also in the voting age pamphlet story

My daughter calling me gross was immediately effective.

Grrr..... She sounds just like Kirino-oba-chan. Even the scornful look in her eyes was the same.

I cleared my throat and changed the subject.

“So? What were you guys doing out so late?”

“Well, we've been looking all around the island to investigate the 'taken by spirits' legend——”

I listened to Yuri's explanation.

It's a rather inconclusive story..... When they went to see the shrine, it seems like they both fell asleep. She said it seems like, because neither of them remember what happened just before they fell asleep.

They didn't wake up until just recently. They said they hadn't suffered any injury or theft——

“That's dangerous..... for a girl”

“Honestly. Every time, every time, no matter how many times I warn you, you go to a dangerous place and get your clothes dirty..... don't be so irresponsible”

“It's Yuri's fault! Yuri forced me to go with her!”

“Huh? I absolutely knew you'd say that! It's a super lie!”

“Kyouzuke, you believe me right?”

“No no, you look like you're lying right now. It's not good to put the blame on your sister, okay~?”

“Otou-san! Be more strict when you scold her!”

“It's not strict?”

“It's not strict at all! It's dere-dere, geez~~~~~! I hate Onee-chan! That father-con chuunibyou woman! It's so gross!”

“What was that? You've got some nerve to defy a god!”

Gnnnn.....! Grrrr.....!

With that kind of feeling, the twin sisters glared at each other.

“You guys are so close”

“““We're not close!”””

In harmony. After all, they're so close.

“Come to think of it Yuri, what was Rino saying about gods earlier?”

“She had a dream about becoming a god or something. It's the usual stuff, you don't need to worry”

“Kukuku! It's not a dream. I opened the door to another world, fulfilled my mission as a god, and came back to the same time as before I left”

“Yes yes, amazing amazing. As expected of Ri-nee, pat, pat”

Yuri didn't argue at all, and let it pass with a super lazy impression.

“Ah, but, I think I had a strange dream too—..... I vaguely remember”

“Huh, what was it?”

When I asked, my second daughter had an indescribable face,

“A dream where I helped otou-san to flirt”

“Can you stop joking around saying things like that in front of okaa-san?”

Papa, heart, thumping!

Glancing at my wife's expression, a strangely gentle smile was there,

“..... Yuri, please tell me the details. For you, it might be premature to discard it as a dream”

“It's just a dream! I'm deeply in love with you! It will be that way forever!”

“Ara, really?”

I was a little relieved by the way she couldn't hide the happiness in her voice.

Thereupon Rino intruded. She clung to and squeezed me.

“Kyouzuke, were you playing with me? We bathed together and showed each other what we looked like when we were born”

“The last time I entered the bathroom with you was ten years ago! Never ever say that to ojii-chan!”

“Which one?”

“Both!”

Even with such a noisy exchange, as if to say “it's always like this”, Yuri was unfazed.

She calmly answered her mother's question.

“If you ask me for details..... I don't remember much..... Hmm.....”

My second daughter seemed to be deep in thought about her dream.

Ah! As if she suddenly remembered something, or perhaps she thought of something, she raised her voice.

“I have something I really want to do right now!”

Yuri spoke as if she were speaking to a close friend,

“After this, let's all go and do fireworks!”

Nostalgia swirled in my chest.

Scenes I don't remember replayed in my mind.

Me, Kuroneko, and a friend we met on the island, in a circle, playing with fireworks.

Summer memories.

Eating watermelon side by side, shooting each other with water guns, I was trampled by a friend who had fallen from a tree.

It must be my imagination. There were no such scenes that summer.

However, I enjoyed those days that never happened.

It was the best summer vacation of my life.

“Alright, let's do it!”

I lowered my eldest daughter from my lap and stoop up.

Feeling like I was returning to my youth.

To my wife who was once Kuroneko, I held out my hand.

“Let's make this summer just as good as that year”

“I couldn't ask for anything more”

I clasped the palm of my beloved.



Afterword

This is Tsukasa Fushimi. Thank you for picking up a copy of "Ore no Imouto ga Konnani Kawaii Wake ga Nai (15) Kuroneko IF first volume".

We started the IF series as part of the "Tsukasa Fushimi 10th Anniversary Project", and after the great response to Ayase IF, we were able to bring you Kuroneko IF.

I am deeply grateful to all the people who supported me.

While Ayase IF was a novelization based on a game scenario I had previously written, Kuroneko IF will be entirely new. This is because the scenario for the Kuroneko route in the PSP games "Ore no Imouto P" and "Ore no Imouto P Tsugu" was written by a scenario writer other than myself. It may be difficult to get it now, but you can read a completely different Kuroneko route scenario in the game.

There is also a spin-off comic of "Ore no Imouto ga Konnani Kawaii Wake ga Nai" called "Ore no Kouhai ga Konnani Kawaii Wake ga Nai" drawn by Sakura Ikeda.

Both works depict a future in which you will be united with Kuroneko.

Even with Kuroneko IF, I will write an if story that will make Kuroneko happy as much as I can.

I am currently working on the second volume of Kuroneko IF. By the time you receive this book, it should be finished.

In the second volume, Kirino and Saori will play an active role.

I'm happy to be able to write and deliver to you again the everyday scene that happened many times in the main story, where the usual friends gather in Akiba, by my own hands.

Lastly, I have an important announcement.

"Shonen Ace" is going to start a comicalization of Kuroneko IF by Airi Mori.

After Ayase IF, I can't believe you're even making a manga about Kuroneko IF.!

I'm really grateful. Please read it.

June 2020 Tsukasa Fushimi

Character file.21

Yuuri Kousaka



高坂悠璃 [Yuuri Kousaka]

The second daughter of Kyouzuke and Ruri Kousaka. She originally had black hair, just like her mother. She is always being pushed around by her older sister, who is suffering from chuunibyou. She is an unconscious siscon. After a long journey, she is reunited with the sister she hates.

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